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CULTIVATING A CHRISTOCENTRIC WORLDVIEW AMONG THE CONGREGATION THROUGH PREACHING

By

STEPHEN LEONARD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors use preaching to cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregants. The study employed a qualitative research design and a semi-structured interview protocol, utilizing interviews with six pastors. The researcher found that a christocentric worldview was comprised of the unified story of God's redemption of his creation, motivation and empowerment by Christ in the Christian life, transformation at the heart level, and participation in God's restoration of man's relationship with God, others, and the creation. In addition, preaching as a communication method is questioned pragmatically, but trusted in a spiritual sense. Also, primary hindrances include challenges of alternative worldview stories, fragmentary hearing, and disconnected preachers. Finally, helpful practices include preaching the redemptive-historical biblical narrative, exegeting the congregation, and a commitment by preachers to their own ongoing relationship with Jesus.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As demonstrated in seminary curriculums, the production of a preacher who adopts a christocentric worldview requires a great deal of time and effort. The process involves the reading of multiple texts, course lectures, course assignments, discussions, and more. Indeed, preachers must be trained to recognize competing worldview assumptions and to replace those worldviews with a christocentric worldview. Seminary students function in a formal context, where they are focused not only on adopting a Christ-centered worldview, but on communicating that worldview to their future congregations. Because they are trained as the teachers and preachers of the church, their curriculum is understandably intensive.

Nevertheless, if the development of Christ-centered preachers requires this type of investment, what is required to cultivate the same christocentric worldview among the congregations to whom they minister? How should pastors, re-formed with a christocentric worldview, now reproduce the same worldview among the members of their congregations? There may be multiple avenues for this pursuit in the local church, but a prime means that requires further consideration is how pastors might cultivate a christocentric worldview among their congregations through preaching. After all, a great deal of the focus of seminary training relates to the proper handling of scripture, especially as it is preached within the church. Further, the Christ-centered movement has produced more literature on hermeneutics and preaching than any other area of ministry.

Yet, there appears to be a gap in the available resources right at the point where students leave seminary and begins to transfer their christocentric worldview to those they serve.

A brief survey of the available resources establishes that while there is a growing body of literature on Christ-centered preaching, contemporary scholarship devotes little attention to how a pastor might pass on Christocentric convictions to the congregation. In his book *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, Edmund Clowney, former professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, begins his chapter entitled "Preparing a Sermon That Presents Christ" by saying, "Gospel preaching presents Jesus Christ."[1] No Christ-centered preachers would disagree. However, the chapter explains gospel preaching as the Lord speaking; a structure that presents Jesus in his word, works, and glory; and a sermon bathed in prayer with the Lord. Notable by its lack is any mention of the Lord's people to whom this preaching is directed.

Sidney Greidanus, professor emeritus of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, and another influential voice on Christ-centered preaching, similarly offers a great deal about interpreting the text in a christocentric way. However, he offers little guidance on how to develop a christocentric worldview among the congregations of the preachers reading his works. For example, in his *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching the Biblical Literature*, Greidanus offers one chapter out of eleven to address, as the chapter is titled, "The Relevance of the Sermon." The rest of this book addresses hermeneutics and preaching structures, informed by hermeneutical principles. Greidanus' book handles the Christ-centered and general interpretive issues

[1] Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 45.

well. However, if pastors seek guidance in cultivating among their congregations the christocentric worldview represented by the book, they will find very little to assist them.

Within chapter eight, Greidanus offers a strong section on what to avoid in "bridging the gap" between the ancient near East and modern America if one is to remain Christ-centered. Greidanus advocates that preachers avoid allegorizing, spiritualizing, imitation of biblical characters, and moralizing as they show the relevance of the text to their congregation.[2] He follows this with a section on "Considerations for Properly Bridging the Gap," offering three helpful suggestions. First, he advocates keeping the focus on the original message of the text.[3] This provides a good reminder that the message of christocentric preaching is based on the message of the text. However, all expository preaching holds this value, so it is not of distinctive value for cultivating a christocentric worldview through preaching.

A better consideration for transferring the relevance of the text to the congregation is Greidanus' section on recognizing the discontinuity between epochs of God's progressive redemptive revelation from creation to new creation. The preacher must understand, preach, and apply the text in light of where the passage fits in redemptive history—especially since the congregation lives more than two thousand years after Easter and Pentecost. Finally, Greidanus offers a helpful reminder that Christ-centered preaching needs to hold on to proper elements of continuity between the redemptive epochs—namely the faithful God and the covenant people of God. Greidanus states that God's covenant faithfulness throughout history is a necessary element of

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[2] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 159-166.

[3] Ibid., 166.

christocentric worldview and preaching because "once we have caught the theocentric focus of the text—what it reveals about *God's* acts, *God's* promises, *God's* will—we have caught hold of the continuity that allows for meaningful application today in spite of discontinuity, for the triune God is constant, faithful, the same today as he was in the distant past."[4]

Despite the inclusion of this short list of potential aids for developing a christocentric worldview among the congregation through preaching, however, Greidanus' book offers little for the task. Even within the chapter on sermonic relevance, beyond the issues just highlighted, Greidanus offers standard sermonic application principles such as focusing on the goal of the text as the goal of the sermon and reminding the preacher that God's word is relevant, and thus a sermon aligned with the goal of the text will be relevant preaching, "Hence preachers today need not transform an objective entity [the Bible] into a relevant word but only need transmit a relevant message from the past to the present."[5]

A look at another of Greidanus' works, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*, reveals an even heavier emphasis on the practice of biblical interpretation rather than congregational christocentric worldview formation. One example comes early in the book in a section called "The Temptation of Human-Centered Preaching." The section provides a helpful critique on the abuse of what Greidanus calls "biographical preaching," wherein the congregation is exhorted to

[4] Ibid., 170.

[5] Ibid., 182.

imitate (or not!) a character in the Bible.[6] However, the focus of the section remains hermeneutical, as this is a "genre mistake" confusing narrative description with prescription for today. There is no mention of how the Old Testament narrative description passages are helpful for shaping a christocentric worldview among contemporary congregations.

The only other place that congregations receive significant attention in this text is in the chapter outlining the steps from the Old Testament text to a christocentric sermon. In step one, Greidanus advises his readers to select a text "with an eye to congregational needs."[7] Greidanus demonstrates a lack of an eye to congregational needs himself when he leads the discussion with the notion that "One of their more routine needs is to hear sermons that relate to the church year," and even better, "And one of their more general needs, in view of the increasing lack of knowledge about the Old Testament, is to hear more sermons based on the Old Testament."[8]

To be fair, congregations do need sermons on both areas Greidanus mentions. But he fails to address why sermons on these topics benefit listeners. The lack of purpose gives the impression that congregations need to hear these sermons for the sake of hearing these sermons. Greidanus also surpasses this initial statement, highlighting congregational needs that go beyond an assumption that people will show up to church saying, "I can't wait for the pastor to address my burning need to know more about Lent!" His comment here is brief, but truly helpful in the discussion:

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[6] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 35-36.

[7] Ibid., 280.

[8] Ibid.

> For more specific needs one has to exegete the congregation and the culture in which it lives. Together with the elders one may detect such needs as confusion and doubt about the Christian faith, fear of the future, a lack of active involvement in God's coming kingdom, a lack of trust in God, a lack of assurance of salvation, a lack of love for each other, a lack of concern to promote justice in the land, a lack of knowledge about God and his will, the temptations on contemporary idols, illness, stress, sorrow, anger, and a host of other needs.[9]

This statement shows that Greidanus understands the needs of the congregation and the need to counter the influences on congregants' lives with a christocentric worldview like that represented in his own writing. Further, the book is an excellent resource for understanding Christ-centered hermeneutics and principles that benefit the preacher in his study. However, Greidanus does not return to the topic of congregational needs in a substantive way that instructs the preacher how to go from the study to the pulpit and from the pulpit to the congregation's worldview in a way that produces ongoing transformation.

Bryan Chapell, president emeritus of Covenant Theological Seminary, in his book *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, offers text that goes a long way toward initiating preachers into a christocentric worldview, as well as that worldview's expression in preaching. As an introductory preaching text, the greater part of the book defends the practice of expository preaching and instructs readers about the process of executing the formal elements of a sermon. Chapell peppers the text with elements that are distinctive to Christ-centered preaching, all of which prime the reader for his fuller treatment in part three, "A Theology of Christ-Centered Messages." Chapter ten is an overview of redemptive-historical hermeneutics that helps the reader understand

[9] Ibid., 281.

the Old and New Testaments in light of Christ and that demonstrates how those interpretive principles inform sermon development.

The researcher in this study found chapter eleven, "Developing Redemptive Sermons," to be particularly useful. This chapter is the focal point of Chapell's instruction as the christocentric framework comes to bear on the congregation and its needs. Here, Chapell offers helpful insights to pastors wanting to practice Christ-centered preaching. For example, Chapell's "Fallen Condition Focus" aids preachers in identifying the redemptive focus of the text, the sermon, and needs of the congregation.[10] He discusses proper and improper approaches to discerning the christocentric focus of the sermon and demonstrates how to "extract accurately and faithfully the redemptive truths of a particular passage."[11]

Without going into too much detail, Chapell then offers some insights that are on point with the focus of this study. For example, he says, "Because Christ-centered preachers consistently proclaim the grace evident in all Scripture, their message highlight the central themes of the glory of God revealed in Christ's love, sacrifice, and victory as they relate to all the issues of faith and life."[12] He then elaborates on prominent themes of grace that preachers may employ in their preaching: grace despite human sin, grace cancelling the guilt of sin, grace defeating the power of sin, and grace compelling

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[10] Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 48-52, 299-300.

[11] Ibid., 308, see 300-312.

[12] Ibid., 312.

holiness.[13] Chapell then proceeds to expound on the proper use of grace as a motivation for holiness as "the telltale sign of Christ-centered preaching."[14]

Most helpful for this study are Chapell's sections on motives for change and means of change. He says, "Nowhere are the effects of Christ-centered exposition more apparent than when preachers apply biblical truths to everyday life."[15] He goes on list "motives for obedience that allow grace responses to take priority over self-protection or self-promotion," including responding to Christ's love, adulation of the mercy of God in Christ, love for others loved by God, and a proper love for self in Christ.[16] Finally, Chapell addresses the need for Christ-centered preachers to connect their congregations with means for worldview change. He instructs, "Applications of biblical truth are not complete until a preacher explains how to plug in to the power God provides."[17] He offers means (such as prayer, scripture, and church attendance) as one way to plug into God's power, and then he offers faith as the other way:

> As redemptive sermons lead people to understand the lack of their own ability to be or do what God requires, preachers naturally lead listeners to a confession of their need for God. This most basic and humble of Christian postures is the essential path to divine power. In our humility, we do not trust in the power of our performance but rely on the truth of what God has promised.[18]

This brief look at Chapell's work reveals a great deal that will benefit pastors who desire to have a christocentric worldview, preach Christ-centered sermons, and apply

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 312-313.

[15] Ibid., 320.

[16] Ibid., 320, 320-323.

[17] Ibid., 323.

[18] Ibid., 325.

those sermons to their congregations. Indeed, the emphasis on properly expounding Christ from the text, showing God's grace in Christ, and applying the means of change are beneficial practices for cultivating a christocentric worldview among a congregation through preaching. Even with such a helpful start, however, the emphasis of Chapell's work remains on creating a Christ-centered preacher who preaches Christ-centered sermons. How pastors might transfer their own christocentric worldview to their congregations is limited to the realm of sermon application and communicated by way of inference rather than considered as a discreet topic. Indeed, although the work provides a helpful starting point, pastors concerned with cultivating a christocentric worldview among their congregants require further development of these thoughts.

Dennis Johnson, professor of practical theology at the California campus of Westminster Theological Seminary, has added a helpful volume to the body of Christ-centered preaching literature in his *Him We Proclaim*. Johnson says the goal of his book is to show ministers how to preach in a way that is consistent with the Apostle Paul's resolve "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"[19] throughout the whole of scripture. He proposes to do this in three ways: first through reuniting the Old and New Testaments, apostolic doctrine, hermeneutics, biblical interpretation, and proclamation; second by suggesting "perspectives and strategies to help ordinary Christians discover their Savior throughout Scripture;" and finally by equipping preachers for Christ-centered preaching regardless of the genre or era of the preaching text.[20] Johnson reviews the history of the Christ-centered preaching movement, examines

[19] 1 Cor. 2:2

[20] Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 1st ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2007), 2-3.

four prevalent iterations currently being practiced, and grounds his thinking in Paul's letter to the Colossians, especially in the letter (or as Johnsons contends, the sermon[21]) to the Hebrews providing deep theological and exegetical support for Christ-centered preaching. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the book is not on the result of the sermon on the congregation as much as it is on producing better christocentric sermons.

Johnson offers some help in respect to the current study. In his analysis of Hebrews as an "apostolic preaching paradigm," he devotes an entire section to the observation that Hebrews addresses a specific audience, and thus so should preaching today. He asserts, "The preacher of Hebrews sees no conflict between making his sermon uncompromisingly Christ-centered as to content and strategically hearer-contoured as to communication and application."[22] Thus, Johnson acknowledges the apostolic precedent for preaching in such a way as to address the specific congregation before the preacher. Second, he notes the connection between redemptive-history and contextualization that bears on a concern for the congregation. "It is especially evident that the Bible is written to effect change, to instill in people the wisdom that leads to salvation by teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:15-17)."[23] Thus Johnson provides some clues that may aid in cultivating a congregation's christocentric worldview. Third, he offers insights on "preaching Christ to effect new creation transformation."[24] He writes that christocentric preaching should not merely result in sermons, but in change in the lives and worldviews of the congregants:

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[21] Ibid., 171-178.

[22] Ibid., 192.

[23] Ibid., 242.

[24] Ibid., 261.

> When our preaching connects each biblical text to Scripture's over arching context of God's mighty and merciful work in history to reverse the effects of sin and bring the created order to its glorious consummation (new creation) and to reestablish a bond of loyalty between himself and redeemed humanity (new covenant), our application of the text to twenty-first century hearers will display an apostolic relevance that is neither faddish nor "timeless."[25]

Johnson's book has an overwhelming focus on matters of theology and hermeneutics and on how to produce christocentric sermons. The concern for cultivating a wholesale christocentric worldview among members of a congregation remains in the background as he predominantly addresses concerns related to biblical interpretation and a defense of Christ-centered preaching. This means there is a need for more research into how to cultivate a christocentric worldview among congregants through preaching. However, Johnson also shares this concern and offers thoughts that will be beneficial to this study.

In *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture*, former preaching professor and senior pastor Zach Eswine offers a Christ-centered preaching book that is concerned with the listener and the congregation. As the title suggests, Eswine's focus is not with hermeneutics, but on those who listen to sermons being preached. Indeed, he devotes part one of the book to consideration for "how neighbor love informs the role of our story in biblical preaching," in addition to the use of homiletic tools and formal elements.[26] Eswine employs the biblical models of the prophet, the priest, and the sage to address the variegated "post-everything landscape" in which pastors minister today. Finally, he explores the implications of cultural engagement and contextualization for contemporary Christ-

[25] Ibid., 261-262.

[26] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 19.

centered preaching. In these ways, Eswine's book offers insights worth exploring when it comes to cultivating a christocentric worldview among congregants through preaching.

While a considerable literature is available on christocentric hermeneutics and sermon preparation, there is a gap in the literature regarding the transference of preachers' christocentric worldviews to their congregation. Given the effort that is put into cultivating a preacher's christocentric worldview during seminary, more attention is needed on how to do the same with congregants, which brings the researcher to the purpose of the present study.

Statement Of Problem And Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors use preaching to cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations. While there is a growing body of literature that relates to Christ-centered preaching, contemporary scholarship devotes little attention to how pastors might pass christocentric convictions to their congregation. The focus of this study was to explore how pastors might accomplish this task specifically through the means of preaching.

Primary Research Questions

To explore how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching, the following research questions served as the focus for this study:

1. What christocentric worldview commitments should preaching communicate to a congregation?
2. How effective is preaching as a medium for communicating christocentric worldview commitments in a congregation?
3. What practices aid the preaching of christocentric worldview commitments in a congregation?

4. What challenges do pastors encounter in preaching christocentric worldview commitments in their congregations?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, the literature on Christ-centered preaching largely neglects the notion of cultivating a christocentric worldview among congregants. Instead, the primary consideration is given to hermeneutics, and the secondary consideration is placed on preachers writing sermons. However, this study concerns the impact that such preaching has on those on the other side of the pulpit.

Secondly, this study explores the examples of those who are successfully cultivating christocentric worldview among their congregations. The study offers best practices for those engaging in this important task, and the researcher hopes that it will stimulate even more creative and biblical thinking by pastors regarding how to preach Christ-centered sermons in ways that truly change and form their congregants.

Finally, this study will help pastors navigate the complexities of preaching Christ in twenty-first century America. This study gives insights into current American religious worldviews and explores how those belief systems influence the worldviews of congregation members. Further, the study provides insights from the literature and the interviews as to how preachers may engage congregations, confronting falsehood, encouraging holiness, and challenging towards missional engagement in a way that honors Christ and is consistent with his redemptive purposes.

Definition of Terms

Christ-Centered Preaching[27] – Christ-centered preaching is expository preaching that discloses God's gracious provision for sin[28] and empowerment for righteousness[29] in Jesus Christ through a grace-captured preacher.[30]

Christocentric Worldview – A person's heart orientation that provides a presuppositional framework for basic beliefs about reality informed by the redemptive-historical narrative of God's restoring pursuit of his creation through his gracious provision for sin and empowerment for righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Expository Preaching – The faithful and accurate exposition of the scriptures, deriving main points and subpoints from a specific biblical text, in a rhetorically sound manner and applied with relevance to the lives of listeners.[31]

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[27] Chapell notes several terms that are interchangeable with the term "Christ-centered preaching," including "Redemptive preaching," "Cross-focused preaching," "Preaching the cross," "preaching the message of grace," "preaching the gospel," "preaching God's redemption," a "Christocentric perspective," "Grace-centered preaching," and "a host of familiar terms," Chapell, 278-279, 313.

[28] "Disclosing God's gracious provision for sin (in Jesus Christ)" refers to the need to highlight and addresses human need in the provision of Christ. Christ-centered preaching clarifies how the gospel motivates and empowers the believer to life-change rather than offering no resources with which to avoid condemnation, battle sin, and perform righteousness. See also ibid., 313.

[29] "Empowerment for righteousness in Jesus Christ" refers to sermons that that ground the believer's motivation for obedience to God in the provision of Christ. "Successful (i.e., biblical) Christ-centered preaching bears the marks of grace-motivated obedience—insisting on the contemporary application biblical mandates while grounding the source of Christian behavior in appreciation of God's glory and provision." Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 122; Greidanus, 118-119, 257-258; Clowney, 48-53.

[30] "Grace-captured preacher" refers to the preacher's own relationship with God. Bryan Chapell's definition of Christ-centered preaching includes a minister whose life is first of all being transformed by the gospel, Chapell, 313; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 96; Charles D. Drew, *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000), 5. Goldsworthy believes that the practice of prayer and submission to God's Word are non-negotiable components of Christ-centered preaching, Chapell, 39. While being clear that the preacher's sanctification does not hinder the effectiveness of God's word, Clowney advocates the importance of seeking God's presence in preaching, Goldsworthy, 127.

[31] See, e.g., Haddon Robinson's definition, "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context…" in Clowney, 55. That main ideas of, and supporting material for, the sermon come from the

Heart – The affective core of a human being.[32] That is, the essential core of a person from which come thinking, feeling, willing, and doing.

Worldview – A person's heart-orientation, embedded in a shared grand story that provides a presuppositional framework for basic beliefs about reality.[33]

Worldview Commitment – The praxis, or way of life, resulting from a particular worldview. While the term "worldview commitment" is not employed in scholarly literature, the term is used in this study to distinguish between a philosophical position and the way of life resulting from a person's worldview.

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text at hand, see Chapell, 132-133. Additionally, Christ-centered preaching will be the faithful exposition of a given text within its larger biblical context. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21. See also, Chapell, 84-85; 132; Haddon Robinson, "The Relevance of Expository Preaching," in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating That Connects*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 82; Donald Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007); Robinson, 115-137; Keith Willhite, "Connecting with Your Congregation," in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating That Connects*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 95-111.

[32] David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 28. Naugle also concludes that "heart" as "the central, defining element of the human person…including the intellectual, affective, volitional and religious life of a human being." Ibid., 268.

[33] James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 122; Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 12; Naugle, 267; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 1st North American ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 122. On the near equation of "worldview" with the biblical notion of the heart, see Naugle, 267-274. See also, "kardioptical" notion, ibid., 291. See pp. 40-49 of the current study for further discussion of this definition.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As detailed in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching. Literature on Christ-centered preaching was reviewed to establish the extent to which authors have already addressed this topic. The literature selected for review provides insight on this question from four distinct perspectives. Biblical literature was examined to investigate whether there is a biblical precedent for cultivating a christocentric worldview, especially in the face of competing worldviews—the kind of circumstance likely to be encountered by contemporary North American preachers.

Worldview literature provides an understanding of the essence of worldview and addresses the process of forming one that is christocentric. Sociological literature was reviewed to help the researcher understand the nature of the current American religious context – the context of the congregants whose worldviews preachers desire to shape. Finally, preaching literature was reviewed to gain insight from leading homileticians about how Christ-centered preaching might be a means for cultivating a christocentric worldview within the congregational setting. The results of the literature review have therefore been arranged under four general topics: biblical foundations, worldview, sociology of religion, and Christ-centered preaching.

Christocentric Worldview Formation: Biblical Foundations

Scripture provides a basis for the Christian preacher to understand the role of Christ-centered preaching, allowing ministers to cultivate a christocentric worldview in the midst of competing religious options. This can bee seen in various passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For the sake of space, the researcher will focus on four examples from the New Testament in which the biblical author cultivates a christocentric worldview.[34]

Ephesians 4:17-24

The Apostle Paul cultivates robust a christocentric worldview [35] in his epistle to the Ephesians.[36] In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to live out their new identity in Christ, and to continue their worldview transformation by contrasting that of their former lives with their new christocentric worldview. Beginning in verse seventeen, Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to establish themselves in a distinctly christocentric worldview[37] by ending former lifestyle practices[38] and taking up

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[34] These passages provide examples of apostolic instruction seeking to cultivate a christocentric worldview, especially in the face of competing worldviews. Additional passages that could be reviewed in this survey include: Exod 20, Deut. 5-11 & 28-30, and Josh 24; from the NT, Matt 5-7; Acts 2, 7, 13, 17; Hebrews.

[35] Clinton Arnold, e.g., sees believers' identification with Christ in his resurrection, exaltation, and new life at the right hand of God as a significant theological contribution of Ephesians in addressing salvation in its present dimension, Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 494-495. Positing that Ephesians was written in response to a "certain weariness in the readers' commitment to the gospel," which has led to "disunity and moral compromise," NT scholar Frank Thielman, acknowledges the emphasis on work of Christ and what that means for the Ephesians' understanding of their identity in Christ in Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 19-28.

[36] For a defense of Pauline authorship of Ephesians, see Arnold, 46-50; Thielman, 1-5. For pseudonimous authorship of Ephesians see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), lix-lxxiii.

[37] Arnold points out that the "therefore" (ou™n) at the beginning of this section refers to both the preceding context and the whole first of the letter "where he establishes the full meaning of the Ephesians new identity in Christ," and thus a worldview shift. Arnold, 277.

a new Christian lifestyle, saying they "must no longer walk as the Gentiles do."[39] Indeed, Paul "insists" [40] with the authority of God,[41] that Christians live in the world in a manner that is distinctively different than that of the Gentiles [42] who live without God's covenant promises. Continuing in verses eighteen and nineteen, Paul describes the unbelieving Gentiles as spiritually ignorant,[43] separated from the hope[44] that comes from knowing God, due to "their hardness of heart."[45] Paul characterizes the non-christocentric worldview as leading to a life of suffering and hopelessness, motivated by the present, whether person realizes it or not.[46]

For Paul, cultivating a christocentric worldview includes a radical lifestyle shift from old ways to a new Christian lifestyle based on a transforming relationship with Christ.[47] A significant feature of a distinctly christocentric worldview seems to be rooted in the reality of "relational knowledge" of Christ himself.[48] Paul's insistence that

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[38] On the importance of practices for worldview, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 80.

[39] Ephesians 4:17

[40] Arnold, 280. Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2009), 203.

[41] Arnold, 281.

[42] Thielman observes a re-formation of their "racial" identity noting that while the Ephesian Christians are still Gentiles, remaining uncircumcised, in a more significant sense, their union with Christ means they are not Gentiles in a spiritual sense any longer. The racial language warrants seeing what we're calling a worldview shift, Thielman, 296.

[43] "darkened in their understanding," Eph. 4:18

[44] "alienated from the life of God," Eph 4:18

[45] Eph 4:18

[46] Arnold, 283; Thielman, 294.

[47] "But that is not the way you learned Christ!" Eph 4:20; Arnold, 284; Chapell, 209.

[48] Thielman, 300-301; Chapell, 209.

believers must live differently from the Gentiles in a distinctly Christian manner is motivated by the power of a life-giving relationship with the person of Jesus, rather than by mere moral living.[49] In verse twenty-one, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they "were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus."[50] For Paul, the manner in which a person walks is rooted in the relationships that person cultivates.[51] Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that taking hold of intimate friendship with Christ requires believers to rid themselves of old habits and sinful patterns.[52]

Without speaking of worldview per se, Chapell observes what could easily be considered a worldview transformation:

> We are learning to be what we are, and we have to be something that we were not…This process is never easy because the habits and patterns of the old self were not something purely extraneous to us, but were integral to our old way of living and thinking…This is what is so threatening: to kill past sin patterns and practices is to lose the self and the world that we knew.[53]

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[49] Chapell and Thielman argue convincingly that verse 21 is best translated "assuming that you have heard *him*," highlighting the connection with a living person. "There is an immediacy of expression in Paul's words, as though there is no intermediary in the truth about Jesus, but rather, he communicates himself. This Jesus that we worship is not merely a historical figure or religious concept. He is real and living, and by his truth his Spirit testifies of his reality in our lives. Not as a history lesson but as the truth of a living personality, we can have a relationship with the One who created all things and loves us eternally," Chapell, 209.

[50] Eph. 4:21; Chapel says of these words, "Jesus is in the truth of the gospel and the truth is in him. To know his truth is to know him. It is as though the truth that we hear from him envelops us and carries us in to relationship with him." Ibid., 210; Thielman notes this teaching and truth are not mere information or abstract knowledge. Thielman, 302.

[51] Thielman, 302.

[52] "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires," Eph. 4:22; "On the basis of their relationship with Christ and their new identity in him, Paul calls these believers to rid themselves of every corrupt practice that was part of their former life," Arnold, 285. See also, Thielman, 303-304.

[53] Chapell, 211. Arnold highlights the Christ centered perspective here, noting "their new identity in Christ becomes a vital perspective and enabling factor in living the Christian life…He balances the 'indicative of the work of Christ on our behalf and the resultant change in our identity with the 'imperative' that calls for us to actualize in our day-to-day lives what is already true of us in Christ," Arnold, 286.

Thus, Paul preaches that intimate friendship with Christ enables Christians to rid themselves of sinful habits and patterns by the Spirit's renewal[54] of the inner person. [55] As believers experience this renewal, they take up new life patterns[56] and are re-created in the "righteousness" and "holiness" that characterizes God's own nature.[57] According to Arnold, putting on this new identity "involves an actualization of this identity in their daily experience through a transformed way of thinking and bring their lives into conformity with the defining characteristics of this new identity—righteousness and holiness."[58]

Titus 2:1-3:10

In his epistle to Titus, the Apostle Paul[59] again robustly cultivates a christocentric worldview among his readers. In this context, Paul admonishes the young church leader Titus to preach the transforming power of Christ's grace to his emerging congregation on Crete. Paul tells Titus to instruct believers on their general manner of life and on how

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[54] "be renewed in the spirit of your minds," Eph 4:23

[55] "Paul's readers are no longer on a self-destructive and ultimately ruinous path but are experiencing continual renewal." Thielman, 305.

[56] "put on the new self," Eph. 4:24

[57] Thielman highlights the similarity of Paul's language to Gen 1:26 in the Septuagint amounting to a re-creation resulting in a christocentric worldview, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind according to our image and according to likeness," and to Paul's own language in Col. 3:10, "And having put on the new human being, renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created him," Thielman, 306. Chapell adds, "We are to take on the patterns of life that are indicative of the new life and new attitudes of Christ in us. Since we are in Christ and he is in us, out lives are to reflect his holiness of life before God, and his love for the lost and needy around us. The pursuit of the old self or the license to do so is no longer the aim. Instead, we are to put on the lifestyle of those 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.' (Eph. 4:24)," Chapell, 214.

[58] Arnold, 290.

[59] On Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, see Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 23-26. William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Word Books, 2000), xlviii-cxxix. George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 4-6.

they ought to live in a non-Christian society. He grounds this instruction in nothing less than the fundamental worldview transformation that Paul, Titus, and other believers have experienced through God's grace.[60] In this way, Paul models preaching to develop a christocentric worldview in this epistle and instructs Titus to do the same, showing how believers' motivation and power to live the Christian life are derived from their identity in Christ.

First, Paul instructs Titus regarding what Christians ought to be and do. Paul begins chapter two by urging Titus to "teach what accords with sound doctrine,"[61] that is, Titus is to teach believers sound doctrine[62] while also rebuking false teachers.[63] In verses two through ten, Paul elaborates on the content of this teaching. Titus is to teach believers of various life-situations the characteristics appropriate to their age, gender, and station in life.[64] Paul makes clear that the reason for this teaching[65] is to have a positive effect on non-Christian society.[66] Further, in Titus 3:1-2, Paul instructs Titus to teach the Cretan church to be subject to civil authorities and to avoid speaking ill of those outside the

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[60] Knight, 350-352.

[61] Titus 2:1

[62] Mounce, 416.

[63] Gordon D. Fee and W. Ward Gasque, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 185.

[64] Mounce notes that the instruction for slaves breaks with the pattern of discussing groups based on age and gender positing that there were particular problems among the slaves on Crete requiring Paul to speak to this group specifically in Mounce, 407.

[65] "that the word of God may not be reviled," Eph 2:5; "so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us," Eph 2:8; "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior," Eph 2:10

[66] "The fundamental teaching of the epistle is that the redemptive work of God in Christ (2:11-14; 3:3-7) must lead to changed live (2:1-10; 3:1-2, 8-11), that Christ sacrificed himself to "redeem us from all lawlessness and cleanse for himself a special people, zealots for good works" (2:14), to "be intent on devoting themselves for good works" (3:8). God's foundation is firm; he knows who are his, and those who name his name must depart wickedness (2 Tim 2:19)," Mounce, 417.

church, opting instead to be considerate as they live among the larger society.[67] Thus believers are to demonstrate their new christocentric worldview through their lifestyle, their spheres of work, and their influence in society.

Second, Paul instructs Titus to teach how the believers' motivation and power to live the Christian life are derived from their new christocentric worldview.[68] The reason the Christians on Crete ought to live as Paul has outlined, according to verse eleven, is because Christ has appeared and brought salvation to all people.[69] Indeed, in verse twelve, Paul writes that Christ's saving grace enables Christians to renounce sin and to truly live out Christian lives in the present.[70] "Not only has God's grace saved believers, but it has the ongoing task of teaching them to live righteously."[71] In verse thirteen, Paul further explains that the appearance of God's grace in Christ enables both present life and an expectant hope for the future return of Christ with his blessings for the believer.[72]

William Mounce , President of BiblicalTraining.org and former New Testament professor remarks, "The obedience of the believer is based on and grows out of the gracious work of work of God in Christ, and is a life lived in light of the eschatological awareness of the Lord's return."[73] In verse fourteen, Paul amplifies the meaning of the appearance of God's grace in the saving work of Christ. The central focus of Paul's

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[67] Knight, 332-334; Mounce, 445.

[68] Knight.

[69] "'The grace of God' is God's gracious intention toward mankind whereby, as Paul goes on to say, he saves, instructs, and enables people," ibid., 318. See also, Mounce, 420.

[70] Knight, 319-320.

[71] Mounce, 423.

[72] Knight, 322.

[73] Mounce, 420-421.

instruction is the saving and empowering work of Christ.[74] Further, Paul tells Titus to teach and preach the same way. Paul makes this abundantly clear in verse fifteen when he instructs Titus, "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you." [75] Paul exhorts Titus to teach "these things" – the instruction and its theological basis in Christ[76] – continually.

Third, not only does Paul teach in this manner himself, he also exhorts Titus to teach and preach "these things." This pattern of instruction followed by the basis of God's enabling grace follows in Titus 3:1-8. Paul again references God's grace in the saving work of Christ as the basis for his instruction to believers regarding non-Christians.[77] Mounce notes Paul's reminder of his own former life prior to God's grace, should he get frustrated with the Cretans.[78] Paul argues in verses four through seven that God has mercifully and radically changed their identity[79] "by a mighty inner transformation of the Holy Spirit (v. 5) whom he bestowed on us through Christ, whose work as Savior had accomplished such a great salvation for such sinners (v.6)."[80] Paul concludes this section in verse seven by stating that the purpose of God's salvation is the

[74] "Paul presents Christ's work as Savior, i.e., his giving himself for us, and thus gives the basis for the salvation previously spoken of. Paul also presents the results that his deed accomplishes in the lives of the Savior's people and thus gives the basis for the effective instruction previously spoken of," Knight, 326.

[75] Titus 2:15.

[76] Knight, 329.

[77] Ibid., 335.

[78] Mounce, 446.

[79] "The Holy Spirit both cleanses believers through regeneration and fills them with by a renewing, forming them in to a new creature." Ibid., 448.

[80] Knight, 335.

future inheritance of the believer resulting from their justification.[81] Once again, Paul admonishes[82] Titus to take his instruction on living lives full of good works "as those who have come to know God's love and kindness, his Spirit's renewing work, and his great salvation."[83] In other words, Paul tells Titus to exhort the Cretan Christians regarding their interactions with non-believers. More than that, Paul models christocentric worldview communication for Titus and instructs him to do the same.

Titus 2:1-3:8 shows Paul instructing Titus to train believers regarding proper Christian characteristics and how to live among a non-Christian society. Paul instructs that everything Christians ought to be and do in these verses needs to be grounded in Christ's saving and enabling work on the cross.

1 Peter 2:4-10

First Peter also illustrates the cultivation of a robustly christocentric worldview even in the midst of a culture hostile to believers.[84] In addressing diaspora Christian churches,[85] Peter[86] greets his readers with what New Testament scholar Karen Jobes calls

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[81] Ibid., 346. Mounce, 451.

[82] According to Mounce, Paul "insists emphatically" that they "live out the practical implications of their theology" as he has outlined to Titus. Mounce, 452.

[83] Knight, 351.

[84] See 1 Peter 2:12, 15, 23; 3:9,16; 4:4, 14; Peter H. Davids, *The Frst Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 9; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), lxiii; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 42-44.

[85] "To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," 1 Peter 1:1

[86] While the authorship of 1 Peter is greatly debated, this paper will refer to the author as Peter. For an overview of the debate from a conservative perspective see Michaels, lxii-lxvii; Jobes, 5-19; Davids, 3-7.

a "sweeping concept for a new identity," [87] citing the believer's new birth in Christ in 1 Peter 1:3 and illustrating a significant shift toward what might be called a christocentric worldview. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter reminds his readers they have been given a new relationship with God, a living hope, and an eternal inheritance.[88] In this way, Peter quickly establishes the reality of the believer's identity in Christ and the christocentric worldview implications of that identity. In chapter one, verse six, the apostle mingles further implications of his readers' Christian identity (genuine faith, joy, praise, and salvation) even as he references their current difficulties and hardships.[89] In 2:4-10, Peter instructs these believers about the nature of their new christocentric worldview.[90]

First, Peter establishes that a christocentric worldview includes acceptance by God and rejection by the world. In verse four, Peter associates his readers with Jesus the "living stone," who is simultaneously rejected by humanity and accepted by God as precious and chosen.[91] In this way, Peter contrasts the Christian's new life in Christ with the hopelessness and idolatry of contemporary paganism.[92] He then establishes the expectation that as Jesus was rejected in the world, a christocentric worldview will cause

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[87] Jobes, 142.

[88] 1 Peter 1:3-5

[89] 1 Peter 1:6.

[90] "He reminds them of their new identity in three ways: (1) indirectly, and independently of the three quotations (v. 5); (2) directly, on the basis of Isa 28:16 (vv. 7-8); (3) directly, in terms drawn loosely from a number of other biblical texts (vv. 9-10)." Michaels, 94.

[91] 1 Peter 2:4

[92] Davids notes that the "living stone" imagery for Christ "both introduces the stone imagery that will dominate the next five verses and designates Christ not as a monument or dead principle, but as the living, resurrected, and therefore life-giving one." Davids, 85; See also Michaels, 98.

believers to experience rejection by outsiders.[93] Similarly, as God valued Jesus, God values those who follow Jesus[94]—a significant positive and aspect of a christocentric worldview.[95]

Second, continuing with the metaphor, Peter teaches that as the "living stone," who is also the "cornerstone,"[96] Jesus provides his followers with new life in a distinctive community that worships the Lord.[97] The metaphorical language establishes that this community forms the new temple of God.[98] Jobes highlights the commitment to community belonging for the christocentric worldview, "The image of living stones being built into a spiritual house whose cornerstone is Christ also speaks of the unity, significance, and purpose of all believers, concepts essential for Christian self-understanding."[99] Through the imagery of Christians as both the spiritual house and as

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[93] "Here Peter introduces the theme of election (cf. 1 Peter 1:1-12) and associates the rejection of the Living Stone with the rejection of those who come to him. The parity of Jesus' experience with the experience of Peter's readers is a conceptual structure throughout the book." Jobes, 146.

[94] "Christ's life is theirs as well (cf. vv. 2-3), and like Christ they are elect and precious to God." Michaels, 99.

[95] Indeed, Jobes point out that Christians' sufferings are to be viewed in light of the long-term, "When Peter describes those who come to Jesus Christ also as 'living stones,' he is implying that their nature derives from the nature of the resurrected Christ. Therefore, the Christians' understanding of their situation is to be shaped by all that Christ has experienced, most important, by Christ's victory over suffering and death." Jobes, 148.

[96] 1 Peter 2:6

[97] Note the parallel language of verses 4 in which Jesus is called "the living stone" and 5 where Christians are liked to Jesus as "living stones" who are being "being built up as a spiritual house".

[98] "'Spiritual house' is a metaphor for the community where the Spirit of God dwells, although Peter's intent is not to call attention to the Holy Spirit per se or to any particular manifestations of the Spirit in the life of the community. His intent is in a more general way to identify the 'house' as a Christian a Christian 'house,' a community belonging uniquely to God and to Jesus Christ." Michaels, 100.

[99] Jobes, 149.

the priests who serve in that house, Peter teaches that a christocentric worldview includes participation in a community of those who worship and sacrifice for the Lord.[100]

Third, employing a chain of Old Testament scriptures, Peter further utilizes the stone imagery to establish Jesus as the dividing distinction among humanity. To some, Jesus is the foundation stone for life. In verse six, Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 to establish Jesus as the foundation stone for a christocentric worldview. Christians build their lives on Jesus. Thus, as the "living cornerstone" was rejected, his followers also suffer rejection. This is a reversal of the basis for honor and shame for Peter's readers. God honors those who are shamed socially for following Christ.[101] Those who are honored and reject Christ will suffer the shame of God's judgment, "the one who ultimately arbitrates honor and shame."[102] Peter employs Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14 from the Old Testament, as well as the stone imagery, to establish Jesus as the dividing point of humanity. When encountering Jesus, people either find a foundation upon which to build their lives,[103] or they find a rock that will trip them and bring about their demise.[104] Jobes helpfully elucidates Peter's emphasis here:

> Here in 1 Peter 2:8 Peter claims that Christ the cornerstone presents an opportunity for trust or rejection. Moreover, rejection of Christ is not an amoral decision; it is itself an instance of sin. This is a message that our religiously pluralistic society today finds as offensive as did first-century polytheistic society. To reject Christ *is* to stumble and sin.[105]

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[100] "'A stone of stumbling, /and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." 1 Peter 2:8; cf. Isa 8:14; see also, Davids, 88.

[101] Michaels, 104.

[102] Jobes, 152-153.

[103] "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, /a cornerstone chosen and precious, /and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 1Peter 2:6; cf. Isa 28:16

[104] Davids, 89-90.

[105] Jobes, 152-153.

Fourth, those with a christocentric worldview understand their role in making God known in the world as members of the people of God. Peter uses the language of Exodus 19:5-6[106] and Isaiah 43:20-21[107] to emphasize that Christians are "becoming part of a new corporate entity that is chosen by and that relates to God."[108] It seems difficult to underestimate the significance of this new corporate identity, as Christians and the Romans outside the church both appear to identify Christians as a new race. For example, the Roman writer Suetonius refers to Christians as a separate race: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians [*Christiani*], a class [*genus*] of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."[109] This view of Christians as a new a race was one of the very reasons Christians endured hardship in the first century world. Jobes explains:

> From the conception of Christians as a distinct race came the accusation that believers in Christ were "haters of mankind." The very goals of Peter's letter—that believers form internal bonds within the Christian community and repudiate certain attitudes and practices of their society—also gave rise to the charge that Christians were antisocial… But Colwell observes, "It was also the victory that overcame the world," as Christians lived as members of a new race and paradoxically won over the masses.[110]

The purpose of this new racial identity is for the proclamation of God and his mercy[111] – the same mercy they have themselves received.[112] According to biblical

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[106] "but you…," "royal priesthood," and "holy nation"

[107] "chosen people"

[108] Davids, 91.

[109] Quoted in Jobes, 163.

[110] Ibid.

[111] "…that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9

[112] "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." 1 Peter 2:10

scholar Peter H. Davids, "Christians are to 'publish abroad' the mighty works of God, which include both his activity in creation and his miracle of redemption in the life, death, resurrection, and revelation of Jesus Christ."[113] Jobes agrees, "The raison d'être of God's 'chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation' is to constitute a special people who make known what God has done, displaying his power, grace and mercy. Peter calls his readers to that purpose as well."[114] As recipients of God's care and concern, Christians proclaim God's redemptive story in a hostile culture, understanding that their identity is not found in societal rejection, but rather in God's acceptance.[115] Christians are God's own chosen, royal, and holy people – the fulfillment of God's promise of the merciful restoration of his people made to Hosea and quoted by Peter.[116] In light of this assertion, the researcher would cautiously suggest that Peter's epistle contends for the communication of a distinctly christocentric worldview as a critical part of the believer's new identity in Christ.

1 John 2:27-3:8

Hostility to true Christian identity can take many forms. Several passages in the New Testament address opposition in terms of persecution; however, competing views of the gospel message pose an equal threat to a biblical view of Christian identity.[117] The Apostle John[118] confronts just this type of scenario in his first epistle. Indeed, Johannine

[113] Davids, 92-93.

[114] Jobes, 163.

[115] Davids, 93.

[116] Hos. 2:23, quoted in 1 Peter 2:10

[117] Consider the role of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as a contemporary example as discussed below.

[118] John's authorship cannot be easily assumed. For the plausibility of John's authorship see I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids:

scholar Gary M. Burge observes theological conflict among John's readers and notes, "the tangible expression of these disagreements came in the form of open conflict and hostility."[119] In addition to hostility, 1 John stresses the identity of Jesus and his followers to counter competing understandings of Christianity. As leading New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall observes, John gives the impression "that it was possible for the orthodox to misunderstand the teaching of the heretics as real Christianity."[120] Rather than debating his opponents, John writes to encourage his audience in a christocentric worldview in the face of the false teaching that was tearing the church apart.[121] In this setting, John provides another biblical example of a New Testament author preaching to cultivate a christocentric worldview in 1 John 2:27-3:8 by emphasizing what could be summarized as the relational, doctrinal, and ethical aspects of a christocentric worldview.[122]

First, John bases a christocentric worldview in the believer's relationship with Christ. The clearest example of the importance of the believer's relationship with God is

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Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 42-48; Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 38-40; John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988); Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John.*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), xxii.

[119] Burge, 31.

[120] Marshall, 21.

[121] E.g., In contrast to a view of 1 John that focuses on testing one's faith in response to the false teachers, Marshall says that John's purpose is in, "assuring them that in fact they do qualify for eternal life." Ibid., 5.

[122] This framework borrows from NT scholar Robert Yarbrough who observes three lines, or axes, of sin verses knowing God in a saving way. The *pistic* trajectory of Johannine salvation is the line between unbelief and belief. The *ethical* trajectory is between disobedience and obedience and the *agapic* trajectory is between deficient love and authentic love. Thus there are three axes "that for John locate knowing God in the full sense. The one who knows him walks in the *fullness* of his light through his Son: the pistic, the ethical, and the agapic." Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 71-75. Cf. to Hiebert's cognitive, evaluative and affective elements of worldview in Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

John's assertion of God's great familial love for believers in 1 John 3:1.[123] The assertion of God's Fatherly love provides grounds for John's previous imperative to "abide" in Christ.[124] Indeed, John encourages his readers to remain steadfast in their faith in the face of a fractured community because of their relationship with the Father through Christ.[125] Interestingly, John connects believers' intimacy with God to the alienation believers experience from the "world," explaining that "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."[126] In this way, John shows that one's relationship with Christ is the fundamental element of christocentric worldview. Intimacy with Christ means alienation from the world; conversely implying that intimacy with the world means alienation from Christ.[127] John also establishes in 1 John 3:2-3 that this relationship is central to christocentric worldview[128] both in the future at the coming of Christ and now as believers live in a world broken by sin. Believers now enjoy being children of God, but the future is better and provides a basis for confidence in a hostile world.[129]

Second, John grounds a christocentric worldview in doctrinal teaching about Christ. In 1 John 3:4, John appears to be countering false teaching regarding the nature of

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[123]Yarbrough identifies three ways in which John sees God's love as great. Its greatness lies in its effect: it makes people children of God. It's greatness also in its purpose (note the i°na clause): enjoying God's familial favor. Third, its greatness is in its quality, providing a contrast with harsh expression of parental love among John's contemporary audience. Yarbrough, 175-176. On believers' filial status see Marshall, 169-170; Stott, 123.

[124] 1 John 2:28-29

[125] Yarbrough, 165, 173; See Marshall, 164; Stott, 121.

[126] 1 John 3:1b

[127] Yarbrough, 176; Marshall, 171.

[128] Yarbrough, 177.

[129] Marshall, 171, 173.

sin that has had adverse effects on the community to whom he writes. While there is some debate about exactly what John means here, there is consensus[130] that John is arguing for the seriousness of sin and in some way repudiating claims that sin is a matter of indifference or that some believers have attained sinlessness.[131] Further, he reminds his readers that the purpose of Christ's "appearing" was to "take away," or atone for sins.[132] As Robert Yarbrough, Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, remarks, "If 3:4 and 3:6 are veiled imperatives that warn by negative examples how John's readers are not to conduct themselves, then 3:5 is the indicative that grounds the imperatives."[133] Again in verse eight, John reminds believers that Christ appeared "to destroy the works of the devil."[134] John goes on to further discusses the origins of sin, the truth about Christ as victor, and the breaking of the devil's hold on believers as they battle sin.[135] In other words, John addresses wrong beliefs in the church about sin and Christian identity by rehearsing Christ's provision through his atoning work for deliverance from the power of sin and the devil.[136]

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[130] For a survey of different views, ibid., 178-184.

[131] "It is as if the specter of further community fragmentation still lingers in the air, and John writes to dispel it," Yarbrough, 173.

[132] 1 John 3:5. "The verb here means 'to take away' sins, rather than 'to atone for' sins, but if we ask how Jesus takes away our sins, the answer must be that he does so as the Lamb of God whose blood atones for sin," Marshall, 177.

[133] Yarbrough, 185.

[134] 1 John 3:8

[135] 1 John 3:8-10. See also Marshall, 184.

[136] "This means that God's people in Christ, far from regarding sin with weary resignation or fearful foreboding, are assured that their struggle against it has both purpose and promise. Christ himself stands behind them as they wrestle with the forces and ideas and behavior against which John warns. The dramatic portrait of Christus victor dominates the literary horizon as the section comes to a close," Yarbrough, 189. See also, Stott, 129.

Third, John demonstrates that a christocentric worldview is evidenced through the lives of those who abide in Christ. Those who abide in Christ and enjoy the familial relationship with the Father anticipate a future reunion with Christ.[137] The result of such a hope, John says in 1 John 3:3, is the purifying effect on a person's life that finds an example and power in the purity of Christ's own life.[138] In verse six and seven, John continues to emphasize the point that God's grace does not promote or excuse sin, but rather drives it out.[139] As Jimmy Agan, associate professor of New Testament and director of homiletics at Covenant Seminary, remarks, John is trying help his readers understand that "Grace is not permission to sin; it is power for holiness,"[140] in an effort to promote righteousness and ethical lives among his readers.[141] The contrast between the lawlessness of sin and the purity of righteousness resulting from abiding in Christ captures an important distinctive about those with a christocentric worldview. If one has the defining love-relationship with God in Christ and believes the apostolic teaching about the life and work of Christ, then one's ethical life will increasingly reflect Christ's own life rather than the lifestyles and patterns of the "world."[142]

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[137] 1 John 3:2

[138] Yarbrough, 179.

[139] As everywhere in 1 John, doctrine informs and generates vibrant practical life. Because the model and precedent for believers' lives is Christ (2:6; 3:3, 7), and in view of the direct connection between his presence in the world and the lives of his followers (4:17), they are to reflect the freedom from sin that he announced to those willing to abide in his teaching (John 8:31) and live as his disciples." Ibid., 186.

[140] Jimmy Agan, lecture delivered in course DM8393 "Multiplying Christ-centered Preaching" (Covenant Theological Seminary, Saint Louis, MO, May 3, 2011).

[141] While an indicative statement syntactically, this verse carries a logically imperatival force to "Become what you are!" In this light, Marshall reads John as teaching that as long as a believer trusts Christ, he won't sin.Marshall, 179.

[142] "The best defense against spiritual disaster is aggressive pursuit of Christ," Yarbrough, 183.

Preliminary Conclusion on Biblical Literature

When these texts are considered together, some common themes emerge. First, the Apostles Paul, Peter, and John cultivate a christocentric worldview among their readers by reminding them that their new relationship knowledge with Christ gives them a new identity and a new life. Second, the apostles cultivate a christocentric worldview by urging and commanding new lifestyle practices that break with the past and reflect the character of Christ. Third, the apostles remind believers that it is Christ who empowers these new ways of living that distinguish his followers in the world. However, believers should also expect rejection by the world as they take up a distinctly christocentric worldview.[143] Finally, the apostles remind their readers that despite opposition, one purpose of a distinctly christocentric worldview is to make God known in the world.[144] Additionally, the apostles demonstrate a christocentric worldview characterized by a dependent relationship with Jesus Christ, who empowers life change as they live a world hostile to their faith.

Understanding Worldview Commitments

Worldview is not a term native to any writer of the New Testament. However, many scholars who study the concept note that understanding the category of worldview is not a precondition to having one or attempting to promote particular worldview commitments – in this case, promoting distinctively a christocentric worldview.[145] To

[143] See 1 Peter 2:4-10; Titus 2:1-3:8

[144] See 1 Peter 2:4-10; Titus 2:1-3:8

[145] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: The Three Essential Books in One Volume* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 279; Wright, 41; Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 31-39; Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 5.

understand how preaching might promote a christocentric worldview, it is important first to understand the concept of worldview and what type of commitments it entails.

Why Worldview Matters

At the outset, it has to be acknowledged that the concept of worldview has not fared well in all quarters. Indeed, there are certainly scholars today who question the comprehensive nature of the notion of worldview, its roots in modernity, its relationship with philosophy, and even the validity of the very concept.[146] Still, as Dallas Baptist University philosophy chair David K. Naugle concludes, worldview is both "one of the central intellectual conceptions in recent times," as well as "a notion of utmost if not final, human, cultural, and Christian significance."[147]

The term *weltanschauung* appeared first in German by Immanuel Kant in 1790, meaning simply "sense perception of the world."[148] W*eltanschauung* as a term and as an evolving concept has also been used throughout history by others, including G.W.F. Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard in the Danish copy word *verdensanskuelse,* Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Worldview has also become a multi-disciplinary concept, gaining traction in the natural sciences through Michael Polanyi and Thomas Kuhn, and extended in the social sciences through psychology (Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung both made use of worldview), sociology (Karl

[146] E.g., David Naugle rehearses the near systemic neglect of the term and concept of worldview in philosophical encyclopedias and dictionaries in the English speaking world in Naugle, 63-64.

[147] Ibid., 344.

[148] Ibid., 58.

Mannheim, Peter Berger, and Karl Marx), and cultural anthropology (Michael Kearney and Robert Redfield).[149]

More significant for the purposes of this study, the concept of "worldview" has enjoyed a significant place in the thought of Protestant Evangelicals[150] going back to James Orr in his *The Christian View of God and His World*, published in 1893. Looking for a way of defending the Christian faith in his day in the midst of what C.S. Lewis called "the un-christening of Europe" and the beginning of a "post-Christian age,"[151] Orr found what he was seeking in the German concept of *weltanschauung*, or worldview—the widest view of understanding any philosophy as a whole.[152] As Orr saw it, "It is the Christian view of things in general which is attacked, and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the attack can be met."[153] However, Orr was not content to speak in generalities about a Christian worldview philosophy. As Naugle observes, Orr's vision of reality was focused and rooted in the person of Jesus Christ.[154] Naugle remarks:

> He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a "Weltanschauung" or "Christian view of the

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[149] For a thorough but readable history of the usage of worldview see ibid., especially, 55-252.

[150] Worldview is also found in significant works of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox writers, see ibid., 33-54.

[151] C. S. Lewis and Walter Hooper, *Selected Literary Essays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 4-5, 12.

[152] Naugle, 7.

[153] James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 3d ed. (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2001; reprint, Reprint), 4.

[154] Naugle, 8.

> world," which stands in marked contrast with theories wrought out from purely philosophical or scientific standpoint. [155]

Orr's task was nothing less than to show how the Christian faith addresses every major concern related to human flourishing.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), journalist, politician, educator, and theologian, is also seen as one of the direct and significant heirs of Orr's worldview thinking in the evangelical Protestant church. For Kuyper, every worldview, or "life system" as he put it, must address "the fundamental relations of all human experience: viz. our relation to *God*, to *man* and to the *world*."[156] Naugle summarizes Kuyper's contribution to the evangelical church by noting the legacy of the Calvinistic Christian worldview, focused on the gospel story as outlined by creation, fall, and redemption.[157] Similarly, Naugle summarizes the important themes of Kuyper's work that continue to influence today:

> First is the idea that God's redemptive "grace restores nature"; that is, the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ is cosmic in scope and entails the renewing of everything in creation to its original divine purpose. Second is the assertion that God is sovereign and has ordered the universe and all aspects of life within it by his law and word ("sphere sovereignties"), thereby giving each thing its particular identity, preserving the wondrous diversity of creation, and preventing the usurpation of one sphere of existence over another. Third is the wholehearted affirmation of the "cultural mandate" in the opening chapters of Genesis, demonstrating that God intends the progressive development of the creation in history as a fundamental occupation to God's glory and for the benefit of mankind. Finally there is the concept of the spiritual "antithesis"; namely that the human race is divided distinctly between believers who acknowledge the redemption and kingship of Jesus Christ and unbelievers who do not, with the concomitant implications of both life orientations across the whole spectrum of human existence.[158]

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[155] Orr, 4.

[156] Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1931), 31. See Also Naugle, 16-26; Sire, 33-34.

[157] Naugle, 22.

[158] Ibid.

Herman Dooyeweerd received and continued to develop the "Kuyperian" tradition of worldview thinking, writing copiously in law, political theory, and philosophy. Dooyeweerd's contribution to worldview thinking was to shift the emphasis away from the abstract role of reason in shaping human understanding to the primacy of the affections or heart in understanding the world. Indeed, he "concludes that the only (and necessary) precondition of philosophy and theory is the ultimate conditions and commitments of the human heart, which is fallen into sin, and is either still in that condition or reborn and restored by God's spirit."[159]

According to Naugle, Dooyeweerd rejects the notion of unbiased theoretical thought "not because of interference from worldviews but because of the belief content and inclination of the heart."[160] Indeed, Dooyeweerd countered the reigning notion of reason as the controlling faculty of humanity, challenging that it is the condition of the heart, the "religious ground motive" (*grondmotief*) that in fact arbitrates the tensions between theories. While for Dooyeweerd this emphasis on the "affective core of the human person"[161] was a rejection of Kuyper's worldview concept, Naugle points out that because "Dooyeweerd so closely identifies the ground motive of the Holy Spirit with the themes of creation, fall, and redemption—the essence of the biblical worldview—we

[159] Jacob Klapwijk, "On Worldviews and Philosophy," in Paul A. Marshall, S. Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, Christian Studies Today (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 51.

[160] Naugle, 26.

[161] Ibid., 28.

cannot help but wonder how much of a distinction can be made between his point of view and Kuyper's."[162]

In many ways, Protestant evangelicalism has twentieth century apologist Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) to thank for bringing worldview thinking into the mid-twentieth century and beyond through those following in his footsteps. Schaeffer contended that everyone has a worldview.[163] He sought to speak to modern man, who was drifting into relativism and falling below what Schaeffer called the "line of despair," leading to the pursuit of various empty "upper story" experiences "as an alternative to the ennui of contemporary life."[164] Schaeffer was well known for exposing futile attempts at fulfillment in many areas of life, while presenting the Christian worldview as the only viable and comprehensive alternative.[165] He taught, "The Christian system (what is taught in the whole Bible) is a unity of thought. Christianity is not just a lot of bits and pieces—there is a beginning and an end, a whole system of truth, and this system is the only system that will stand up to all the questions that are presented to us as we face the reality of existence."[166] This presentation of the Christian worldview as the answer to questions for the whole of life brought the notion of worldview form James Orr to the present

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[162] Ibid., 29.

[163] "In this sense all people are philosophers, for all people have a worldview. This is as true of the man digging a ditch as it is of the philosopher in the university." Schaeffer, 279.

[164] Naugle, 30.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Schaeffer, 178.

generation of Christian thinkers,[167] who continue to develop a systematic understanding of Christianity and its implications for every area of life.

This brief history demonstrates first, that the concept of worldview has a longstanding track record in both secular and Christian usage across a wide range of disciplines, making it a viable concept for contemporary thinkers. Secondly, particularly among the Christian writers, some central notions have surfaced that give meaning to what Christian thinkers mean when they discuss worldview. Beginning with Orr, the Christian worldview focuses on reality as rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and the total life commitments that attend that truth. Kuyper adds that the kingship of Jesus provides for redemption across the whole spectrum of human existence. Dooyeweerd emphasizes the religious commitments of the heart – the affective core – to the concept. Schaeffer takes the notion of religious heart commitments and demonstrates that only the Christian worldview answers humanity's questions for the whole of life in a world full of people that are desperately seeking answers for the longings of their hearts.

Defining Worldview

Definitions for "worldview" abound. On one end of the spectrum is Naugle's vague "Roughly speaking, it refers to a person's interpretation of reality and a basic view of life."[168] On the other end of the spectrum is James Sire's robust definition:

> A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously,

[167] Among those who have continued to use the worldview framework are Charles Colson, Arthur Holmes, James Olthius, Nancy Pearcey, Ronald Nash, James Sire, Brian Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, as well as other writers whose works this paper will explore.

[168] Naugle, 260.

> consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.[169]

While this study will draw heavily from Sire's definition, there appear to be at least three consistent components to worldview definitions from the surveyed literature.

First, worldview is a framework for basic beliefs about reality. Worldview experts Brian Walsh and J. Richard Middleton note, "World views are perceptual frameworks."[170] That is, worldviews are the most basic starting point that people use to interpret reality. Worldviews are the grid, or lens, that people use to look at the rest of the world and form their basic beliefs.[171] It is important to note that worldviews are basic beliefs about reality[172] – the way the world really is. As theologian N. T. Wright observes:

> Even the relativist, who believes that everybody's point of view on everything is equally valid even though apparently incompatible, is obedient to an underlying story about reality which comes into explicit conflict with most other stories, which speak of reality as in the last analysis a seamless web, open in principle to experience, observation and discussion. It is ironic that many people in the modern world have regarded Christianity as a private worldview, a set of private stories. Some Christians have played right into this trap. But in principle the whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world.[173]

This study will later develop the issue of story addressed here by Wright. However, he illustrates that while worldview has a strong subjective element, nevertheless, it is a

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[169] Sire, 122.

[170] Walsh and Middleton, 17.

[171] Naugle, 260; Goheen and Bartholomew, 12; Wolters, 2; Sire, 122. Additionally note that while the issue will not be addressed here for space, objections exist to the limits of the visual analogy of worldview language. See, e.g., Hiebert, 15.

[172] Hiebert, 15; Naugle, 23; Sire, 122.

[173] Wright, 167.

subjective perspective on objective reality. Worldview is the beginning of beliefs about things.

Second, worldview is a person's orientation of the heart. Hiebert notes the importance of the heart in worldview, noting the affective dimensions defining worldview as the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives."[174]As discussed earlier, Dooyeweerd heavily emphasized the role of the heart in his thinking on worldview.[175] Having written on the topic of worldview for over three decades, in recent years James Sire has gone so far as to revise his definition of worldview to include the heart. Writing a book devoted to explaining what he sees as a major shift in his thinking, Sire says:

> First a worldview is not fundamentally a set of propositions or a web of beliefs. That is, it is not first and foremost a matter of the intellect. Nor is it fundamentally a matter of language or a semiotic system of narrative signs. The intellect is surely involved, and language is present as a tool of the intellect, but the essence of a worldview lies deep in the inner recesses of the human self. It is a matter of the soul and is represented more as a spiritual orientation, or perhaps disposition, that as a matter of mind alone.[176]

Based on his analysis of worldview and the Bible, David Naugle makes three suggestions. First, he says that worldview is understood "in terms of the biblical doctrine of the heart."[177] He explains:

> What did the originators of "worldview" accidentally stumble upon, what were unintentionally identifying about humankind when they invented this notion? I propose that they were putting their finger in an adequate though incomplete way,

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[174] Hiebert, 15.

[175] Naugle, 28.

[176] Sire, 123.

[177] Naugle, 269.

> on the biblical understanding of the pivotal nature and function of the human experience. What the heart is and does in a biblical way is what the philosophers were getting at unconsciously in coining the term "worldview."[178]

Second, he says that what comes out of the heart reflects what first enters it.[179] That is, the "life-shaping content of the heart" reflects both nature and nurture – both genetic and experiential inputs.[180] Finally, "*out of* the heart go the issues of life."[181] That is, speech, attitudes, beliefs, and actions cannot but help reveal a person's heart and worldview.

Third, worldview encompasses one's presuppositional assumptions about the world. N.T. Wright says that worldviews focus on the presuppositional and the pre-cognitive.[182] Sire's definition notes that worldview includes "assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false."[183] Hiebert calls worldview the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions,"[184] noting that worldview occurs at the precognitive, assumptive level. Thus, while a great deal more can be said, noting three common definitional features, worldview is a person's heart orientation that provides a presuppositional framework for basic beliefs about reality.

Understanding what worldview is provides the basis for understanding what worldview does. Authors tend to give more attention to this aspect of worldview thinking

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[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid., 270.

[180] Ibid., 270-271.

[181] Ibid., 271.

[182] Wright, 122.

[183] James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 21; Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 122.

[184] Hiebert, 15.

than they give to defining it.[185] There is not complete agreement about the role worldview plays in human life, and there is not room here to explore every perspective on the interaction between worldview and life. Still, authors tend to agree on three roles of worldview, namely that worldview interprets reality, orders life, and answers life's questions.

What function do worldviews play in human life? First, worldviews interpret reality. Walsh and Middleton note, "World views are best understood as we see them incarnated, fleshed out in actual ways of life. They are not systems of thought, like theologies or philosophies. Rather, world views are perceptual frameworks. They are ways of seeing."[186] Sire's definition notes the way worldview provides an interpretive grid for the world.[187] Philosopher Arthur Holmes says that worldview unifies life and helps "us see life whole and find meaning in each part…"[188]

Worldviews do not merely interpret reality; they order life. While worldview thinking has received some criticism for being overly focused on the cognitive dimension of human life,[189] there is a clear strain of worldview thinking that is quick to point out the

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[185] Note e.g., that Arthur Holmes nearly defines worldview in pragmatic terms in his classic work on worldview, Arthur Frank Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, Studies in a Christian World View (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983). Brian Walsh and J. Richard Middleton move quickly from a fairly broad and imprecise definition to the role of worldview in answering life's questions. Walsh and Middleton, 17. Even David Naugle, helpful as his book is for providing the broad view on what worldview is, fails to offer a working definition before p. 260. Even then, it is only a broad definition. Naugle.

[186] Walsh and Middleton, 17.

[187] Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 122; Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 21.

[188] Holmes, 3.

[189] See e.g., Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 60-64. Crouch agues that worldview has become a disembodied *concept*, rather than a lived reality in the church. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World : The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6-10, 23-27. Hunter similarly critiques worldview thinking as an idealistic approach to transformation—particularly large-scale

lived dimension of worldview. Thus, N.T. Wright suggests, "worldviews include a praxis, a way-of-being-in-the-world."[190] Theologian Albert Wolters observes that everyone has a worldview, whether they can articulate it or not, and that it shows up most clearly at the most critical moments of life. "[T]heir basic beliefs emerge quickly enough when they are faced with practical emergencies, current political issues, or convictions that clash with their own." [191] According to Wolters, having a worldview is part of being a human being and can be observed, as it guides one's life like a creed or a map to chart one's course.[192] Goheen and Bartholomew write that worldviews "give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives."[193] That is, precognitive heart commitments inherently determine one's actions in the world. Hiebert adds that anthropologically speaking, worldview is what groups of people "use to order their lives."[194]

Finally, worldviews answer life questions. Abraham Kuyper says that every worldview, or "life system" as he put it, must address "the fundamental relations of all human experience: viz. our relation to *God*, to *man* and to the *world*."[195] Multiple

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change. Smith, 23-24. Smith argues that many worldview approaches view humans as "thinking machines" and thus address more "heady" concerns to the neglect of "a more holistic, affective, embodied anthropology". In each case these critiques have merit. Due to space, rather than engaging with such objections in depth, one should observe a strong vein of embodied life in worldview literature.

[190] Wright, 123.

[191] Wolters, 4.

[192] Ibid., 5.

[193] Goheen and Bartholomew, 12.

[194] Hiebert, 15.

[195] Kuyper, 31. See Also Naugle, 16-26; Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 33-34.

schemes exist for addressing life questions.[196] Walsh and Middleton observe that where "we place our faith determines the worldview we will adopt. Put another way, our ultimate faith commitment sets the contours of our worldview."[197] It is in this context that Walsh and Middleton offer a set of helpful diagnostic questions for understanding the nature of a person's faith commitment:

> It is the way we answer four basic questions facing everyone: (1) *Who am I?* Or, what is the nature, task and purpose of human beings? (2) *Where am I?* Or, what is the nature of the world and universe I live in? (3) *What's wrong?* Or, what is the basic problem or obstacle that keeps me from attaining fulfillment? In other words, how do I understand evil? And (4) *What's the remedy?* Or, how is it possible to overcome this hindrance to my fulfillment? In other words, how do I find salvation?[198]

The answers to these questions reveal both personal and communal worldview stories, as well as one's religious commitments. Thus, worldview interprets and orders life in light of the big questions. This leads to the next point—the communication of worldviews.

Because the focus of this study is on the role of communication—namely preaching—in forming a christocentric worldview, this chapter will examine how worldview is communicated, or expressed. As has been previously mentioned, worldviews are embodied and thus communicated in human practices. Wright notes how people express issues of "identity, environment, evil and eschatology in cultural *symbols*. These can be both artifacts and events—festivals, family gatherings, and the like."[199] Philosopher James K. A. Smith argues convincingly that "habits (precognitive

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[196] For other such taxonomies see, Wright, 123; Goheen and Bartholomew, 24; Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 22-23; Naugle, 260, 267, 274.

[197] Walsh and Middleton, 35.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Wright, 123.

dispositions) are formed by practices: routines and rituals that inscribe particular ongoing habits into our character, such that they become second nature to us."[200] Indeed, according to Smith, "thin" practices (mundane tasks such as tooth brushing or eating the same cereal for breakfast, which have their performance as the only end) do not shape or perhaps even reflect much about worldview. On the other hand, "thick" practices (meaningful and intended to shape one's identity) "both signal and shape our core values or our most significant desires."[201]

More significant for this research, worldviews are expressed through narrative and stories. N.T. Wright writes about the importance of stories for reinforcing worldview, especially noting how first century Jewish Christians used stories to this very effect:

> First-century Jews, like all other peoples, perceived the world, and events within the world, within a grid of interpretation and expectation. Their particular grid consisted at its heart of their belief that world was made by a good, wise and omnipotent god, who had chosen Israel as his special people; they believed that their national history, their communal and traditional story, supplied them with lenses through which they could perceive events in the world, through which they could make some sense of them and order their lives accordingly. They told stories which embodied, exemplified and so reinforced their worldview, and in so doing threw down a particularly subversive challenge to alternative worldviews.[202]

Wright goes on to say that worldview stories conflict with each other because of the normative explanatory power they purport to have about the nature of the world and, by way of implication, the identity of those who hold the conflicting worldview stories. In other words, "they claim to makes sense of the whole of reality."[203] Wright also points

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[200] Smith, 80.

[201] Ibid., 82.

[202] Wright, 41.

[203] Ibid.

out that it is not only first-century Christians who tell stories to establish interpretative grids and expectations about the world and their identity in it. All people do it, both in the first century[204] and now, both Christians and those of other beliefs.

David Naugle similarly notes how critical narrative is in communicating worldview. In his chapter on theological reflections, Naugle contends that worldviews are a semiotic system, and he continues:

> …as a semiotic structure consists primarily of a network of *narrative signs* that offers an interpretation of reality and establishes and overarching framework for life. Since people are storytelling creatures who define themselves and the cosmos in a narrative fashion, the content of a worldview seems best associated with this most relevant activity of human nature.[205]

Naugle develops the importance of story since antiquity through more recent analysis of myths and fairy tales for communicating societal worldviews.[206]

Hiebert highlights the role of narrative for worldview formation in his discussion on root myths. "In anthropology, the term [myth] takes on technical meaning. A myth is the overarching story, bigger than history and believed to be true, that serves as a paradigm for people to understand the larger stories in which ordinary lives are embedded."[207] Goheen and Bartholomew go so far as to embed the role of narrative in their definition of worldview, saying "Worldview is an articulation of the basic beliefs

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[204] In addition to Jewish Christians, Wright briefly mentions other first-century Jewish groups with contrasting worldview stories including the Essenes, Josephus, and even Jesus. Ibid.

[205] Naugle, 291.

[206] Ibid., 297-303. Naugle observes how inescapable the need is for narrative in the human soul, illustrated by the attempt in modernity to do away with narrative. "Indeed, a deep irony has characterized this crusade against narratives, for it has been based on an unconscious Cartesian story featuring heroic human reason as the protagonist of a master plot to take possession of the by scientific prowess." Ibid., 300.

[207] Hiebert, 66.

embedded in a shared grand story that are rooted in a faith commitment and that give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives."[208]

Without going too deep into the territory of the section on preaching for Christ-centered worldview commitments, the nature of the Christian worldview narrative needs brief attention. Going back to Orr,[209] there is precedent for capturing the Christian worldview narrative in some variation of the four "act" story of God's creation, human rebellion, God's redemption in Christ, and God's final restoration of all things. Acknowledging differences in terminology and number of "acts," the Christian worldview narrative has often been communicated this way.[210]

Since the stories humans tell themselves perform such a significant role in worldview formation, understanding the redemptive story increasingly appears to play an important role in forming a christocentric worldview. As an example, Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright writes on the significance of Israel's belief in the monotheism of YHWH (covenant name of God in the Old Testament) – that is, that YHWH exists in a class of his own, he is *sui generis* – the one and only God.[211] Further, Wright demonstrates that the Old Testament scriptures portray God as revealing himself through

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[208] Goheen and Bartholomew, 12.

[209] Naugle, 22.

[210] For examples of the Christian worldview narrative with various subtle differences see, Hiebert, 300-305; On Abraham Kuyper's framework see, Naugle, 22; Crouch, 101-186; Wright; Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture : Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Goheen and Bartholomew; Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found : The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2005); Wolters.

[211] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 80-92.

his historical acts to make himself known to Israel and her oppressors.[212] Through the lens of the New Testament, God reveals his identity as the same monotheistic God revealed in the Old Testament, now seen in the person of Jesus Christ. Further, God extends his self-revelation beyond Israel so he will be recognized by all nations to ends of the earth.[213] Indeed Wright connects the Old Testament and the New Testament on this score by showing that the New Testament clearly teaches that it is "precisely in knowing Jesus as Creator, Ruler, Judge and Savior that the nations will know YHWH."[214] In the same way as YHWH, Jesus Christ exists *sui generis.*[215] In painting this portrait, Wright contends that scripture tells the worldview story of God forming a people identified by what he terms "christocentric biblical monotheism."[216] Given the importance of the Christian narrative for communicating the Christian worldview, this issue will resurface in the section on preaching.

Preliminary Conclusions on Worldview

To understand how preaching might promote a distinctively christocentric worldview, it is important to understand the concept of worldview and what type of commitments it entails. Going forward, this chapter will continue using the term

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[212] This is the theme of chapter 3, "The Living God Makes Himself known in Israel." Much of the discussion is encapsulated when Wright says, "Israel's primary source of knowing YHWH to be the one true and living God *(the God)* was their experience of his grace in historical acts of deliverance. But those acts of deliverance for *Israel* meant judgment on their *oppressors*. These enemies too would come to know God, but they would know him as the God of justice who could not be resisted with impunity." Ibid., 92-93.

[213] Ibid., 122.

[214] Ibid., 123.

[215] Ibid., 131.

[216] Wright defines Christocentric biblical monotheism as stating "YHWH is God in heaven above and the earth beneath, and there is no other; and that Jesus is Lord, and ther is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved." Ibid.

worldview to designate a person's heart orientation that provides a presuppositional framework for basic beliefs about reality. This framework interprets and orders life in light of guiding life questions and is powerfully communicated through narrative. At this stage, three conclusions emerge from the literature: 1) worldview can nearly be equated with heart commitments, 2) the heart (what Dooyeweerd calls the "affective core of a human being") determines practices, and 3) the Christian narrative may prove an important tool for preaching that will promote distinctively a christocentric worldview.

Sociology and the Contours of American Religious Worldviews

The issue of religious worldview commitments is not limited to the biblical record or philosophical history. Sociologists and culture watchers have asked many questions in recent years in an effort to understand the state of religious worldview commitments in American culture. To understand how preaching might promote a christocentric worldview among today's American congregations, it is important first to understand the current state of religious worldview commitments in the United States.

Most Americans Believe in God

Americans tend to believe in God. Sociologists of religion widely agree that Americans are a religious people. For example, according to sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell in their massive book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Americans rank high by social science's three B's of religiosity—religious belonging, behaving, and believing.[217] Putnam and Campbell report:

> Eighty-three percent of Americans report belonging to a religion; 40 percent report attending religious services nearly every week or more; 59 percent pray at least weekly; a third report reading scripture with this same frequency. Many

[217] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 7.

> Americans also have firm religious beliefs. Eighty percent are absolutely sure that there is a God. Sixty percent are absolutely sure that there is a heaven, although fewer (52 percent) have this level of certainty about life after death. Slightly fewer, 49 percent, are certain that there is a hell.[218]

As strong as the religiosity of Americans appears in light of the preceding statistics, the international picture only strengthens the notion that Americans are religious people. Indeed, according to the World Values Survey, Americans come in sixth in terms of religiosity, far ahead other developed nations, and "in this global ranking of religious observance America edges out even the Iran of the ayatollahs."[219] Thus the first statement one can make about American religious worldview is that Americans are generally religious, and most believe in God.

Americans are not only religious, but American religion takes a generally Judeo-Christian shape. Depending on the survey, sociologists have identified that Evangelical Protestants make up between twenty to thirty percent of the population, Black Protestants represent approximately eight percent of the population, fourteen percent of Americans are Mainline Protestants, between twenty-three and twenty-nine percent of Americans identify as Roman Catholics, two to five percent of Americans associate with Judaism, around seven percent identify with other religions (Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, et al.), around seventeen to twenty percent are unaffiliated and 0.2 percent of Americans identify themselves agnostics or atheists.[220] This means between sixty-five to eighty one percent identify themselves with Christian

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[218] Ibid.

[219] Ibid., 8.

[220] See, e.g., the Faith Matters Survey conducted in 2006 reported in ibid., 16-17, 104. See also the General Social Survey reported in Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers : How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75-76.

faith traditions, and another two to five percent associate with Judaism (the largest minority religion in America), with around seven percent associating with all other faith traditions (some of which have historic connections to Christian faith traditions). This indicates that not only are Americans religious, Americans self-identify in broad terms with the Christian religious tradition.

While it is true that most Americans believe in God, some sociological research suggests that Americans believe in one of four gods. Baylor sociologists Paul Froese and Christopher Bader argue in their book *America's Four Gods*, the reporting of the results from the Baylor Religion Survey,[221] that differences among Americans in public discourse about issues like morality, politics, poverty, scientific research, government spending, and more, are not based in differences in region, gender, age, race, political affiliation, or even denominational affiliation; rather they are based on an individuals' view of who God is. Froese and Bader identify four gods in whom Americans believe, based on three dimensions of believers' view of God's character: "(1) the extent to which God *loves* the world, (2) the extent to which God *judges* the world, and (3) the extent to which God *engages* in the world."[222]

Noting that "a God without love is almost entirely foreign to the American religious mind,"[223] Froese and Bader observe the key differences among Americans' views of God relate to their understanding of God's judgment and engagement. Thus,

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[221] The Baylor Religion Survey attempted to fill the gap between the General Social Survey and National Election Study by specifically asking respondents over two dozen questions characterizing God's personality. "Wave 1, collected in the fall of 2005, consists of a random sample of 1,721 Americans. Wave 2, collected in the fall of 2007, provides responses from a random sample of 1,648 Americans." Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, *America's Four Gods: What We Say About God-- & What That Says About Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 167.

[222] Ibid., 24.

[223] Ibid., 15.

they divide the American public into these four categories: 1) the "Authoritative God" – Americans who believe in a God who is both engaged in the world and judgmental, 2) the "Benevolent God" – Americans who believe in a God who is engaged, yet nonjudgmental, 3) the "Critical God" – Americans who believe in a God who is judgmental, but disengaged, and 4) the "Distant God" – Americans who believe in a nonjudgmental and disengaged God.[224] Froese and Bader note one final category for their four-God typology – Atheism – observing, "around 5 percent of Americans indicate they are atheists."[225] That such a small percentage of the American population self-identifies as atheists only underscores that most Americans are religious and believe in God. One surprising conclusion of the Baylor Religion Study is that Americans' belief in God cuts across denominational lines and even cuts across religious traditions.[226]

This means that while most Americans are religious and believe in God, not all would agree on the character traits of God, or even the faith tradition to which God belongs, and some believe in no God at all.

The Nature of American Pluralism

D. A. Carson, New Testament scholar and author of many books about American religious commitments, suggests a framework that offers explanation for the discrepancy between the reality of high percentages of religious homogeneity and Americans' perception of the United States as a pluralistic nation. Carson suggests the tri-part taxonomy of empirical pluralism, cherished pluralism and philosophical pluralism. Empirical pluralism is "the sheer diversity of race, value systems, heritage, language,

[224] Ibid., 24.

[225] Ibid., 35.

[226] Ibid., 51.

culture, and religion in many Western and some other nations."[227] In a word, empirical pluralism captures the reality of diversity in the United States today. In cherished pluralism, the realities of empirical pluralism become "a value in itself, even a priority."[228] Os Guinness sums up cherished pluralism, observing that it is "the process by which the number of options in the private sphere of modern society rapidly multiplies at all levels, especially at the level of world view, faiths, and ideologies."[229] Choice and change as a normative and applauded state of mind is the essence of cherished pluralism.

Beyond either empirical or cherished pluralism lies what Carson labels philosophical pluralism, which is largely assumed but left unmentioned in sociological literature. Indeed, philosophical pluralism appears to be a significant presupposition in sociology of religion research. Philosophical pluralism asserts, "[A]ny notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is *necessarily* wrong. The only absolute creed is the creed of pluralism. No religion has the right to pronounce itself right or true, and the others false, or even (in the majority view) relatively inferior."[230] Carson rightly notes that philosophical pluralism is not merely an expedient way to justify a variety of moral lifestyle choices. Rather, it "is tied to some of the most complex intellectual developments in Western thought,"[231] including postmodernism. Carson writes that the result of philosophical pluralism negatively affects

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[227] D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), 13.

[228] Ibid., 18.

[229] Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 92.

[230] Carson, 19.

[231] Ibid.

American religious commitments inside and outside the church.

Religious diversity, or empirical pluralism, is becoming a greater reality in America. Increasing immigration and globalization have increased Americans' exposure to non-traditional Western religions and Eastern religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.[232] Robert Wuthnow, chair of the Department of Sociology at Princeton University, highlights that especially those in their twenties and thirties are having much greater contact with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus than those of their parents' and grandparents' generations.[233] This means that while non-Christian religious traditions currently represent a small portion of American society, immigration and sustained adherence to these faiths from one generation to the next may increase the percentage of adherents to non-Western religions in the years to come. Second, according to Duke sociologist Mark Chaves, non-Christian religious traditions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) in the United States, while possessing a statistically minority status, still represent approximately two percent of the American population.[234] Further, Putnam and Campbell conclude, "Most Americans are intimately acquainted with people of other faiths."[235] In other words, a significant number of people within the United States associate with people of minority religious traditions. Finally, the fact that less than ten percent of the

[232] Wuthnow, 101.

[233] Wuthnow reports that for those in their twenties, 32% report a fair amount of contact with Muslims and 20% have had contact with Buddhists. For those their thirties through their sixties, the numbers drop to around 7% contact with Muslims and 13% with Buddhists. 11% of those 65 and older report contact with Muslims and 7% with Buddhists. Ibid.

[234] Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 23.

[235] Putnam and Campbell posit what they term "the Aunt Susan Principle," and the "my pal Al Principle" that says essentially most people have a person in their life, a hypothetical Aunt Susan, or a hypothetical pal named Al, whom they love despite significant religious differences. More concisely, "We are suggesting that having a religiously diverse social network leads to a more positive assessment of specific religious groups." Putnam and Campbell, 526.

American population peaceably practices minority religious traditions in the United States testifies to the reality of empirical religious pluralism among Americans. Chaves reports that, "Americans have become more accepting of religious diversity and more appreciative of religions other than their own."[236] Thus, empirical pluralism—the reality of religious diversity—increasingly describes religion in America.

Religious diversity is not only an increasing reality; it is valued in America. That is, cherished pluralism is an even greater force than empirical pluralism. Indeed, sociology of religion literature appears to presuppose the value of religious pluralism. The work of Putnam and Campbell provides a helpful example. Early in their large work on American religion, Putnam and Campbell ask, "How can religious pluralism coexist with religious polarization?"[237] Putnam and Campbell go further in revealing their presupposition of the priority of pluralism, noting, "The sheer vitality of religion in America means that it is ever evolving, although that evolution takes place against a backdrop of some constants too…But to get from polarization to peaceful pluralism, we consider a number of other questions along the way." [238]

Putnam and Campbell draw significant attention to their cherished pluralism-based bias in stating that the goal of the book is to answer "how the United States can combine religious diversity, religious commitment, and religious tolerance, especially in a period of religious polarization."[239] The goal for Putnam and Campbell is religious pluralism as an answer to religious polarization. Indeed, Putnam and Campbell value

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[236] Chaves, 26.

[237] Putnam and Campbell, 4.

[238] Ibid., 6-7.

[239] Ibid., 35.

what they term bridging relationships with "Aunt Sally" and "my pal Al," in which Americans experience meaningful connections with family and friends of other faiths and thereby increasingly embrace the importance of pluralistic religion.[240] Putnam and Campbell theorize that the solution to any religious tension in America is this "web of interlocking personal relationships among people of many different faiths."[241] That is, they believe that religious diversity, commitment, and tolerance are the solutions to religious conflict.

Given the high value placed on pluralism in American religious commitments, it is interesting to note that the United States does not appear to be as religiously diverse as is sometimes believed. To be sure, many religious traditions peaceably exist in the United States, including Judaism, the Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Buddhism, Islam, and other minority religions. As Putnam and Campbell note, "the national sentiment moved from grudging acceptance of other faiths to a way station of tacit approval to an outright embrace of religious differences."[242] Even so, as already noted, between sixty-five and eighty one percent of Americans identify in surveys with either a Protestant or Roman Catholic tradition.[243] Given that Judaism enjoys a large minority religious tradition at two to five percent of the population, (a slightly smaller percentage compared with all other minority religions combined), this means that Americans seem to be mostly pluralistic within the variegated denominations and congregations of the larger

[240] Ibid., 495-496, 547.

[241] Ibid., 550.

[242] Ibid., 549.

[243] Ibid., 16-17, 104; Wuthnow, 75-76.

framework of the Judeo-Christian tradition.[244] This exemplifies Carson's notion of cherished pluralism – a pluralist-centric worldview value that goes beyond the reality of religious diversity in America.

The value of religious diversity in the form of philosophical pluralism has become a moral force determining the extent of religious commitments in America. As Philosophy of Religion professor Harold Netland observes, discussions of the presence of pluralism in the West are often closely related to discussions of the shift from modernism to postmodernism.[245] Netland employs Lawrence Cahoone's taxonomy to classify postmodernism into historical postmodernism, methodological postmodernism, and positive postmodernism, highlighting connections between pluralism and postmodernism.[246] Historical postmodernism merely asserts that a sufficiently significant shift in recent social, cultural, and political thought has occurred to justify the claim there has been a shift from modernism to postmodernism.[247] This shift is extremely difficult to pin down historically, but may be loosely associated with the influence from the writings of the likes of Sigmund Freud, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Nietzsche.[248]

Like cherished pluralism, methodological postmodernism reflects a preference for postmodernism over modernism. There is a "rejection of the idea that we can have secure foundations to knowledge or arrive at truths about reality that are universal and

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[244] Putnam and Campbell, 16-17, 104; Wuthnow, 75-76.

[245] Harold Netland, *Encountering Reiligious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 16.

[246] Ibid., 59. See also, Lawrence Cahoone, ed., *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 17.

[247] Netland, 59.

[248] Ibid., 59-60.

unchanging."[249] The skeptical and relativistic epistemology of methodological postmodernism, prompted by increased awareness of disagreement and diversity, provides a fitting framework for cherished and philosophical pluralism to thrive.[250] Postmodernity is reflected in the writings of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), and Richard Rorty (1931-2007). Foucault advanced the postmodern notion that "all truth or knowledge claims are implicitly or explicitly assertions of power."[251] Derrida is best known for his views on hermeneutics, especially the notion that meaning is not fixed, but open-ended in texts.[252] Lyotard is responsible for first asserting an "incredulity toward metanarratives." [253] This has important implications for a christocentric worldview that will be discussed below. Rorty rejected secure foundations for knowledge, or foundationalism, preferring to "understand both truth and knowledge in pragmatic terms as socially constructed conventions for 'what works.'"[254]

Positive postmodernism goes beyond the rejection of modernity's epistemology, attempting to reinterpret basic issues and "characteristically stress the limited and perspectival nature of all inquiry and the futility of trying to arrive at certainty of knowledge…while trying to avoid the incoherencies of thoroughgoing relativism."[255]

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[249] Ibid., 60.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Ibid., 61.

[252] Ibid., 62.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Ibid., 63.

[255] Ibid., 64.

The New Face of American Pluralism—Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

In addition to the foregoing studies on the contours of American religious commitments, sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton suggest, "The de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers is what we might well call 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.'"[256] Smith and Snell summarize the tenets of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, based on the interviews of the National Study of Youth and Religion (henceforth NSYR) as: 1) a God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth, 2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions, 3) the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself, 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem, and 5) good people go to heaven when they die.[257] Smith and Denton are careful to point out that no teenager they interviewed would identify himself or herself with the terminology "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Rather, it is their term to distill their findings of American teenage religion.[258]

Before moving on to ways Smith and Denton's research intersects with other studies on American religion, a brief review of some core components of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is in order. Namely, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism focuses on the development of a moralistic approach to life, provides therapeutic benefits to its

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[256] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

[257] Ibid., 162-163.

[258] Ibid., 162.

adherents, and promotes a creating, morality ordering, and uninvolved God.[259] When it comes to the moral life, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism "Teaches that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person. That means being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, responsible, at work on self-improvement, taking care of one's health, and doing one's best to be successful."[260] As fellow NSYR researcher Kendra Creasy Dean notes, "God, above all else, is 'nice,'"[261] and those who follow him should try to be nice too.[262] This religion of "being nice," however, does not have any bearing on "their decisions, choice of friends, or behaviors. It does not help them obey God, work toward a common good, compose an identity, or belong to a distinctive community."[263]

Secondly, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism's emphasis on therapeutic benefits contrasts sharply with historic Christian doctrine about God:

> This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etcetera. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally a bout feeling good, happy, secure, at peace.[264]

The emphasis of the therapeutic dimension of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is on feeling good and being happy. Indeed, it appears that feeling good can and often does even come at the expense of striving to be good, and it offers nothing at this point for the defense of

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[259] Ibid., 163-164.

[260] Ibid., 163.

[261] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

[262] Ibid., 29.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Smith and Denton, 163-164.

good for others. In other words, the therapeutic benefits of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism are focused entirely on one's own sense of feeling good and happy.

Third, while the god of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism created the world and generally defines morality, this god is:

> Not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs—especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance…In this sense, the Deism here is revised from its classical eighteenth-century version by the therapeutic qualifier, making the distant God selectively available for taking care of needs…He designed the universe and establishes moral law and order, but this God is not Trinitarian, he did not speak through the Torah or the prophets of Israel, was never resurrected from the dead, and does not fill and transform people through his Spirit. This God is not demanding. He actually can't be, because his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good.[265]

This lengthy quote establishes just how distant, safe, and benevolent the god of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism actually is. Indeed, this god stays at arm's length until the Moralistic Therapeutic Deist needs a service or wishes to have a sense of happiness restored, and then that god moves safely back to his usual distant place, awaiting his next request.

Again, based on the thousands of interviews of the NSYR, Smith and Denton posit that some version of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is the dominant religion among American teenagers, and their analysis of American religion does not stop there. Smith and Denton further observe that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism may not be limited to American teenagers. They note, "Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misperceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is

[265] Ibid., 164-165.

their parents."[266] Smith and Denton even suggest that the best social predictor of American teenagers' religious commitments is the beliefs of their parents.[267] Indeed "Parents and other adults, as we have suggested, most likely 'will get what they are.'"[268] These observations mean that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism not only characterizes the religious lives of American Teenagers, but there is reason to think Moralistic Therapeutic Deism characterizes a large percentage of their parents as well.

Froese and Bader, while not speaking about Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, also observe that a person's view of God says much more about a person's actual beliefs than whether a person identifies as Catholic, Baptist, or Jewish.[269] This observation by Froese and Bader reinforces the need for this study, as it reinforces the reality that worldview commitments matter more than these forms of self-identification when it comes to religious self-identification. Smith and Snell found in their study of emerging adults that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism continues for the most part into young adulthood, "Not simply a religion embraced during the teenage years, MTD [Moralistic Therapeutic Deism] continues to be the faith of very many emerging adults."[270]

Dean further posits that churches play a significant role as well. While one might expect that the issue is poor communication, Dean contends rather that the church in the United States communicates well and clearly. However, it communicates moral affirmation, feel-better faith and a hands-off God. In other words, the question lies with

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[266] Ibid., 261.

[267] Ibid. See also, Froese and Bader, 38.

[268] Smith and Denton, 261.

[269] Froese and Bader, 43.

[270] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155.

content rather than delivery. Dean asks, "What if the blasé religiosity of most American teenagers is not the result of poor communication but the result of excellent communication of a watered-down gospel so devoid of God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ, so immune to the sending love of the Holy Spirit that it might not be Christianity at all?"[271] These observations and questions lead one to conclude that the dominant religious worldview in American today – among teenagers and adults – is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

The rise of the religious nones,[272] especially among young adults in the United States, adds another perspective on the dominant outlook on religion reported by Smith and Snell. For example, Smith and Snell find that emerging adults in their study were quite open to discussing religion with researchers.[273] This may be surprising given the increase in religious nones and the fact that Smith and Snell themselves found that religiosity significantly declines among American emerging adults.[274] Yet it appears the reason for emerging adults' openness may be because "religion is just not that important to most of them."[275] The result is that they tend not to give religion much thought or discussion. To the degree that they do engage the topic of religion, they tend to think religions "share the same core principles,"[276] namely good morals that ought to be taught to children. "The best thing about religion is that it helps people to be good, to make good

[271] Dean, 12.

[272] Putnam and Campbell, 91-122.

[273] Smith and Snell, 286.

[274] Ibid., 142.

[275] Ibid., 286.

[276] Ibid.

choices, to behave well."[277] Once they've learned these basics in morality, emerging adults believe they have "graduated" from the need for involvement in a religious congregation.

Furthermore, according to Smith and Snell, religion is of little consequence to the lives of emerging adults. They explain, "Religious beliefs do not seem to be important, action-driving commitments, but rather mental assents to ideas that have few consequences. What actually do have the power and authority to drive life instead are the feelings and inclinations of the emerging adults themselves."[278] Religion's failure to perform as a life-driver makes sense when one considers that while religion may be generally useful, emerging adults ignore the particularities of any given religion as unimportant details.[279] The fact that religious beliefs are not significant life-drivers may also explain the apparent juxtaposition between the research of Froese and Bader and that of Smith and Snell and Smith and Denton. That is, Americans may believe in four different gods, whose engagement varies in a theoretical way. But the majority religion that Americans practice appears to be disengaged from God when it comes to anything that matters beyond mental assent. Thus, Smith and Snell seem justified in their contention that the majority religion practiced in the United States today is deistic in nature.[280] To take it a step further, perhaps deistic religious practice suggests an underlying worldview that counts for more than the label of a person's religious tradition, or even which of the four gods they follow.

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[277] Ibid.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid.

[280] Ibid., 155-156.

Preliminary Conclusions on the Contours of American Religious Commitments

To understand how preaching might cultivate a christocentric worldview, it is important first to understand the current state of religious commitments in the United States. This review of sociological literature reveals that most Americans believe in a Judeo-Christian God – at least nominally. Yet the dominant religion among Americans today – cutting across significant religious lines, and even the four gods of Froese and Bader in practice – is what Smith and Denton label "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[281] In brief, American religion is largely an eclectic mix of pluralistic values and a distant, safe, and benevolent god whose goal is human happiness.[282]

Christ-Centered Preaching

Literature on Christ-centered preaching was reviewed to establish the extent to which authors already address concerns about communicating a christocentric worldview to congregations through preaching. This review surveys the literature to discover several things: first, the core christocentric worldview commitments preaching should communicate, second, the effectiveness of preaching as a medium for communicating those commitments, third, the challenges pastors might encounter in this task, and fourth, what practices aid christocentric worldview preaching.

Core Commitments of Christocentric Worldview Preaching

Christ-centered preaching literature assumes more than it clarifies regarding what makes preaching Christ-centered. The literature provides even less insight regarding the core worldview commitments intended to be transferred from preacher to congregation,

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[281] Smith and Denton, 162.

[282] Because Deism historically begins with the Judeo-Christian creator-God of the Bible, understood by the deist to be distant, benevolent, and a rewarder of right conduct, the term "deism" should be understood for the remainder of this paper to refer to this God.

as the focus of the literature is largely on hermeneutical considerations.[283] Those wanting some kind of rubric for this approach will only find it through careful reading and tracking of the various ways authors use terms such as "Christ-centered" and how the various authors work out the implications for the study of the Bible and preaching. One goal of this research has been to build this type of rubric. According to the literature, a christocentric worldview is framed by the redemptive-historical story, emphasizes dependence on Christ, and seeks deep change in the listener.

First, a christocentric worldview is framed by the redemptive-historical story. The starting place for a Christ-centered worldview is in recognizing the unified story of the history of God's redemption and restoration of his creation, climaxing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as told in the Bible. As the worldview literature makes clear, worldviews are the stories that provide the framework through which people make sense of the world.[284] The preaching literature emphasizes how the overarching and unified narrative of scripture provides the context for God's self-revelation in Christ and an interpretation of history from God's perspective.

Edmund Clowney, former president of Westminster Theological Seminary and professor of practical theology, highlights the importance of the worldview story when he says, "The coming of Christ brings the fulfillment, the realization of what was anticipated by God's servants, the saviors, prophets, kings, priests, and judges of the Old Covenant."[285] Similarly, Sidney Greidanus, professor emeritus of preaching at Calvin

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[283] Consider, for example, some of the best-known works on Christ-centered preaching, the titles of which belie their focus on Scripture, hermeneutics and the pulpit rather than on the desired worldview that Christ-centered preaching would produce. Greidanus; Johnson; Clowney; Greidanus; Goldsworthy.

[284] For Examples see Hiebert, 66; Goheen and Bartholomew, 12.

[285] Clowney, 20.

Seminary, adds, "Scripture teaches one universal kingdom history that encompasses all of created reality: past, present, and future."[286] In discussing the importance of the historical progression of God's revelation in scripture, Graeme Goldsworthy, former lecturer at Moore Theological College, argues:

> The unity of the biblical history lies in the selective way in which the story is pursued in certain directions and not by other possible routes. There is a continuation to the story line that resists turning into blind alleys. Thus we follow Seth, not Cain; Shem, not Ham; Abraham, not Lot; Israel, not Edom; David, not Saul; Judah, not Samaria; Jerusalem, not Babylon. Finally, the most significant selection is that of Jesus as the Messiah over against the current Jewish rejection of him.[287]

While not using the terminology of christocentric worldview, Goldsworthy applies the importance of the biblical story to preaching practice. The redemptive story is not only about those who lived so far away, so long ago in "Bible times"—it is the story of the listeners in the congregation today as well. This means that to preach a christocentric worldview, one's preaching must follow the path from the text to Christ and from Christ to the hearer.[288] Goldsworthy identifies this as the critical step in keeping a Christ-centered focus and forming a christocentric worldview because, "Biblical theology shows that the essence of hermeneutics lies in the fact that every part of the Bible leads to Christ, and thus to the believer who is in Christ."[289]

Greidanus also notes the importance of establishing the nature of reality according to the way God sees reality, notably centered on Christ. "The Bible is unique and indispensable for preaching because it provides the definitive interpretation of God's acts

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[286] Greidanus, 95.

[287] Goldsworthy, 69.

[288] Ibid., 117.

[289] Ibid., 128.

in history [and]…alone provides the normative proclamation of acts of redemption and the response he requires."[290] The way God provides access to his view of reality is through the redemptive story of the gospel, which Goldsworthy says is "God's plan to restore all of reality to right relationships."[291] Here, Greidanus's language is reminiscent of the worldview language examined earlier in this study, this time with an emphasis on the narrative of God's restoring work through Christ.

Observing the coming of Christ as the climax of the redemptive story of God's pursuit of his people, Clowney says, "The Lord always takes the initiative in redemption."[292] God's initiative is true from Adam's sin to his deliverance of Noah in the flood, to his promises to Abraham, to his deliverance of Israel through Moses, to Joshua's victory in the land of promise, through the judges, David, and Solomon, through the New Testament, and "the coming of Christ [which] brings the fulfillment, the realization of what was anticipated by God's servants, the saviors, prophets, kings, priests, and judges of the Old Covenant."[293] Jesus is presented as the "final and fullest expression of God's revelation of his kingdom,"[294] and it is in one's encounter with Christ that "everything changes for us."[295] The preaching literature says a great deal about the importance of the redemptive-historical narrative for preaching a christocentric worldview.

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[290] Greidanus, 13.

[291] Goldsworthy, 116.

[292] Clowney, 18.

[293] Ibid., 20. See also, Goldsworthy, 34-40.

[294] Goldsworthy, 33.

[295] Ibid.

Second, and not surprisingly for those familiar with Christ-centered preaching, a christocentric worldview emphasizes dependence on Christ. Preachers have long noted that addressing human need includes helping people see the brokenness of the world as the result of human rebellion against God.[296] The rebellion has resulted in a morass of problems in every sphere of human life, from one's relationship with God, to one's understanding of identity, to one's interpersonal relationships, to one's relationships to the world.[297] Preaching that cultivates a christocentric worldview will expose human need and apply God's provision for that need. Because the notion that preaching ought to address human need is so widespread, motivating holiness by grace distinguishes preaching that promotes a christocentric worldview. In his book *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Bryan Chapell, president emeritus of Covenant Theological Seminary and professor of homiletics, observes:

> How preachers motivate others to be holy is often the telltale sign of Christ-centered preaching…Christ-centered preaching bears the marks of grace-motivated obedience—insisting on the contemporary application of biblical mandates while grounding the source of Christian behavior in appreciation of God's glory and provision.[298]

The reason it is important for preachers to connect their sermons to the gospel of grace, according to Goldsworthy, is that people are legalists at heart. He tells of a former colleague who believed that congregations often desire sermons that tell them how bad

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[296] For classic treatments of the importance of addressing human need in preaching, see also, Jay Edward Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 21, 35; John Albert Broadus and Vernon L. Stanfield, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 165-178; Robinson, 168; Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 80-81; Sunukjian, 193; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 1st American ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982).

[297] Chapell, 19.

[298] Ibid., 313.

they are and what they need to do about it. This colleague went so far as to say that if the preacher "really laid down the law about how they needed to improve their spiritual lives and performance, they would come away feeling really good. Battered and bruised, but good!"[299] The problem with this approach is the way it actually feeds legalistic tendencies. Goldsworthy remarked, "We would love to be able to say that we have fulfilled all kinds of conditions, be they tarrying, surrendering fully, or getting rid of every known sin, so that God may truly bless us."[300] Even worse, this approach actually demeans the demands of the law, lowering the standard to one which sinful human beings can attain apart from the empowering presence of God in Christ. Goldsworthy outlines this concern eloquently:

> In practical terms, if we as preachers lay down the marks of the spiritual Christian, or the mature church, or the godly parent, or the obedient child, or the caring pastor, or the responsible elder, or the wise church leader, and if we do this in a way that implies that conformity is simply a matter of understanding and being obedient, then we are being legalists and we risk undoing the very thing we want to build up. We may achieve the outward semblance of conformity to the biblical pattern, but we do it at the expense of the gospel of grace that alone can produce the reality of these desirable goals. To say what we should be and do and not link it with a clear exposition of what God has about our failure to be and do perfectly as he wills is to reject the grace of God and to lead people to lust after self-help and self-improvement in a way that, to call a spade a spade, is godless.[301]

These words demonstrate that preaching that cultivates a christocentric worldview, exposing God's generous self-revelation in Christ, who mercifully provides for failure for the congregation and who enables them to be and do what they ought.

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[299] Goldsworthy, 118.

[300] Ibid.

[301] Ibid., 119.

Preaching that emphasizes dependence on Christ supplies the proper motivation and the power people need to live as God commands. Chapell says that "commanding people to do what is right without explaining why or how inevitably hurts them because they are left to consider their works and abilities as the cause of God's acceptance or affection."[302] Instead, Chapell believes that Christ-centered preaching incorporates the motivating and enabling power of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ in every sermon. "Grace rules—as both the most powerful motivation and the only true means of Christian obedience,"[303] freeing the preacher and the church from legalistic motivations and moralistic applications. Chapell acknowledges the difficulty and the necessity of the task:

> Consistently preaching the necessity for obedience *and* the proper motivation for holiness is one the most difficult tasks that preachers face in every generation. Successful (i.e., biblical) Christ-centered preaching bears the marks of grace-motivated obedience—insisting on the contemporary application biblical mandates while grounding the source of Christian behavior in appreciation of God's glory and provision.[304]

This means that to shape a christocentric worldview in the religious context of America today, sermons must not focus merely on behavioral change. According to Michael Fabarez, senior pastor of Compass Bible Church in southern California, preaching must

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[302] Chapell, 318. Contrast this approach with a more common approach emphasizing brute obedience. For example Andy Stanley advocates applying biblical moral principles to unbelievers, "After all, a principle is a principle. Many biblical passages work for anybody. Unconditional love makes an impact regardless of your theology. So does honesty and a dozen of other virtues. If I can get an unbeliever to apply a biblical principle and he or she sees results, that's progress." Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 128. Haddon Robinson advocates determining an observable behavior that will result as the purpose of a sermon. While christocentric worldview formation ought to produce results that will be observable in behavioral practices, Robinson fails to offer any answer to the point Chapell raises. Robinson, 107-112. Donald R. Sunukjian similarly asserts, "Our ultimate goal of speaking [i.e. preaching] is not knowledge but godly behavior, not information but Christlikeness." Again what's missing is *how* to do this—the *power* for this behavior. Sunukjian, 110.

[303] Chapell, 50.

[304] Ibid., 313.

provide "the right perspective, adequate resources, and a biblical motivation to change."[305]

Third, christocentric worldview preaching seeks deep change in the listener. Most of the Christ-centered preaching literature warns against moralism.[306] However, because the preaching literature focuses so heavily on the hermeneutics of Christ-centered preaching rather than on the listening congregation, there is little discussion regarding the seat of human essence and where change occurs. Given what the sociological literature reveals about the nature of the American religious worldview, it would seem that preaching God's grace resources may offer a contrasting distinctive for developing a christocentric worldview among members of the preacher's congregation.

First, the literature argues that it is God's grace provided in Jesus Christ that produces real change in the listener. Charles D. Drew, senior pastor of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in New York, states that Christ-centered sermons show how Jesus fulfills the text, producing life-change in the listener. He notes, "The disciples knew these Scriptures well and when they finally understood how Jesus fulfilled them, their lives changes dramatically."[307] As Fabarez points out, this is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, making the believer acceptable to God and empowering obedience to God's commands. He continues, "Christ lived the life our listeners should have lived. He 'fulfilled all righteousness' (Matt 3:15 NIV)."[308] Recognizing both the act of proclamation by the preacher and the reception by the listener, Tim Keller, pastor of

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[305] Fabarez, 114.

[306] More will be said about the topic below under the section "Challenges Hindering Christocentric Worldview Preaching"

[307] Drew, 5.

[308] Fabarez, 124.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, identifies how clear articulation of the gospel within Christ-centered preaching produces heart change in the listener.[309] Brian Vos, pastor of Trinity United Reformed Church in Michigan, similarly emphasizes the way Christ-centered preaching affects the heart, drawing it closer to Jesus Christ.[310]

Believers need the gospel for progress in their faith as much as for the start of their faith. Goldsworthy summarizes that "sanctification is justification in action."[311] For Goldsworthy, the gospel is central to any application in preaching. He says, "Expository, biblical, preaching is always an exposition of the gospel and its implications. While we don't always focus on the heart of the gospel, no text will yield its true significance unless it is understood in its organic relationship to the gospel."[312] Christ-centered preaching does not rest solely on what Jesus taught (or solely on what the Bible teaches), "but in what God did and does in raising Christ from the dead and sending the Spirit of God in Christ to breathe a new creation."[313] When it offers listeners proper gospel motivation, preaching can be a significant means for the Holy Spirit to form a Christ-centered worldview and transform a person into a new creation.

Bryan Chapell says, "At its heart, preaching is not merely the proclamation of truth but truth applied."[314] However, in contrast to Pluralistic Moralistic Therapeutic

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[309] Tim Keller, "The Girl Nobody Wanted," in *Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund Clowney*, Dennis E. Johnson, ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 55.

[310] Brian Vos, "Lord and Servant," in ibid., 74.

[311] Goldsworthy, 96.

[312] Ibid.

[313] Andrew M. Weyermann, "Christ-Centered Preaching," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28, no. 6 (2001): 596.

[314] Chapell, 210. For additional treatment of general principles for application see e.g., Adams; Broadus and Stanfield; Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2001); Robinson.

Deism, Christ-centered application that produces a distinctively christocentric worldview will "motivate believers primarily by grace, not by guilt or greed. If God has freed his people from the guilt and power of sin, then preachers have no right to put believers back under the weight Jesus bore."[315] According to Chapell, proper application of scripture includes practical steps (acts of devotion), means of grace (avenues of discipline), and especially means of dependence that enable the application:

> All are valuable, but the last is indispensible for Christ-centered preaching because without dependence the other two D's [devotion and discipline] can actually prompt unbiblical behavior disguised as means of soliciting God's aid…Means of enablement that reflect biblical priorities are no behaviors alone but rather acts of devotion and discipline resting on divine mercy alone that direct, stimulate, and allow the human heart to rest, rely, and rejoice in God's work alone.[316]

While this is not Chapell's particular emphasis, he nevertheless shows a significant means of cultivating a christocentric worldview through Christ-centered preaching, understanding that the only means by which believers can live in line with God and distinct from the surrounding religious context is through the divine enablement that comes from their identity in and union with Christ.[317]

Pastor and homiletics professor Zack Eswine writes on the importance of applying biblical truth, while emphasizing that "preachers must point out the provision God makes in order to call people to the obedience God requires."[318] Eswine employs Jesus' image of the vine in John 15 to explain how a christocentric worldview is essential for obedience to God's redemptive work.

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[315] Chapell, 219.

[316] Ibid., 222n38.

[317] John 15:5; ibid., 222.

[318] Eswine, 51.

> Apart from Christ, no one can do what a preacher says. By this I do not mean that we must call to our memory the time that Christ first called us to himself and then, inspired by that memory, work hard and do what God requires. Rather, I mean that no one can do what Christ requires unless they have the present nourishment of the vine.[319]

Preaching that directs the listener to his identity in Christ counters the moral thinking of those inside and outside the church who might fall into thinking it possible to have an actual relationship with God apart from the Son.[320] Indeed, as Dennis Johnson, professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, notes, "God's gracious redemptive initiative, announced in Scripture's indicatives, creates the context for our grateful, faithful response to Scripture's imperatives."[321]

While the literature does not offer as much help as desired in outlining the core worldview commitments intended to be transferred from preacher to congregation, it does provide some useful insight. As surveyed here, a christocentric worldview is framed by the redemptive-historical story, emphasizes dependence on Christ, and seeks deep change in the listener.

Preaching as a Medium for Communicating Christocentric Worldview

In addition to understanding core christocentric worldview commitments, this study focused on how effective preaching is as a medium for communicating a christocentric worldview. The literature defends the efficacy of preaching as a means for communicating a christocentric worldview. Expository preaching provides the power, authority, and confidence required to communicate a christocentric worldview.

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[319] Ibid., 52.

[320] Ibid., 54.

[321] Johnson, 261.

First, expository preaching provides the power required to communicate a christocentric worldview. Chapell writes that the preached word of God presents the power of the word and the work of the Holy Spirit. He explains, "Biblical exposition binds the preacher and the people to the only source of true spiritual change."[322] He then continues:

> When we proclaim the Word, we bring the work of the Holy Spirit to bear on other's lives. No truth grants greater encouragement in our preaching and give us more cause to expect results from our efforts. The work of the Spirit is as inextricably linked to preaching as heat is to the light a bulb emits. When we present the light of God's Word, his Spirit performs his purposes of warming, melting, and conforming hearts to his will.[323]

Expository preaching also provides the authority required to communicate a christocentric worldview. As Greidanus observes, the issue of authority distinguishes between the preacher's opinion and an authoritative message requiring response.[324] Greidanus notes:

> The only proper authority for preaching is divine authority—the authority of God's heralds, his ambassadors, his agents. Heralds and ambassadors, we have seen, do not speak their own word but that of their sender. Contemporary preachers, similarly, if they wish to speak with divine authority, must speak not their own word but that of their Sender.[325]

Greidanus goes on to clarify that the word of the preacher's sender is found in the Bible as "the record of the redemptive history" and "the definitive *interpretation* of God's acts

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[322] Chapell, 30.

[323] Ibid., 33.

[324] Greidanus, 12.

[325] Ibid.

in history" thus making it the "only normative source" for preaching to today's congregations.[326]

Greidanus is not alone in seeing expository preaching as a means of providing needed authority for the preacher. Looking at the issue through the lens of a biblical theology of preaching, Goldsworthy elucidates the authority of the Bible and the preacher's authority in preaching it. In the act of creation, "God spoke the universe into being" and established his word as the primary means by which he relates to his world.[327] In Genesis three, the account of human rebellion the Bible reveals a "failed attempt to leap upward and to wrest authority from God and his word," resulting in rebellious humanity asking the ongoing question "Has God said?" by which "they seek to escape the implications of the right of their Creator to rule them by his word."[328] Moving forward, not only does God establish his covenant word as his promise of faithfulness to his people, he also establishes the role of his prophets, who variously preach "a word of indictment, a word of judgment, and a word of restoration" when they utter the phrase, "Thus says the Lord."[329]

According to Goldsworthy, this prophetic preaching lays the groundwork for "the future saving work of God," which will be proclaimed through the ongoing authoritative preaching of God's word.[330] Thus, Goldsworthy provides a biblical theology for the authority that attends the preaching of God's word. Sounding a note of caution, Bryan

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[326] Ibid., 13.

[327] Goldsworthy, 35.

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid., 36-37, 38.

[330] Ibid., 39.

Chapell affirms the authority of preaching God's word while reminding the preacher to beware the temptation to become authoritarian in tone. "A pastor confident of the Bible's truth is able to preach with great force or with great gentleness and still speak with authority."[331]

Expository preaching provides the confidence that is necessary for a preacher who is communicating a christocentric worldview. Greidanus observes the importance of preachers and congregations both understanding that "we are not expounding our own fallible views but the word of God."[332] Chapell voices both the preacher's concerns about the ridiculous nature of preaching and the reason he is able to engage in preaching with confidence.

> Common sense rebels against claims that eternal destinies will change simply because we voice thoughts from an ancient text. When Paul commends the foolishness of the preaching—not foolish preaching—he acknowledges the apparent senselessness of trying to transform attitudes, lifestyles, philosophical perspectives, and faith commitments with mere words about a once crucified rabbi (see 1 Cor 1:21). Yet preaching endures and the gospel spreads because the Holy Spirit uses puny human efforts as the conduit for the force of his own Word.

Thus, while the preacher may question preaching as a medium for the task of communicating a christocentric worldview, the literature points out the power, authority, and confidence that affirms preaching as a worthy means.

Challenges Hindering Christocentric Worldview Preaching

Beyond the sociological literature, this study explored the challenges that preaching literature highlights about communicating a christocentric worldview through preaching. Two primary challenges identified were moralism and allegory.

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[331] Chapell, 94.

[332] Greidanus, 16.

The preaching literature had a great deal to say about the danger of moralism. Bryan Chapell warns against what he calls "the deadly be's," that is, "messages that contain only moral instruction [which] imply that we are able to change our fallen condition in our own strength."[333] Chapell categorizes these messages as "be like," be good," and "be disciplined" messages.[334] "Be like" messages exhort listeners to be like the commendable aspect of a Bible character (or avoid the non-commendable). "Be good" messages focus on behaviors alone. Whether it's an exhortation to be holy, or to avoid immorality, "or even a more sophisticated 'Renew your heart by doing what God commands,'" these messages on their own merely exhort people to be good. He explains, "Evangelical preaching that implies we are saved by grace but kept by our obedience not only undermines the work of God in sanctification but ultimately casts doubt on the nature of God (i.e., he loves us only when we are good enough) and thus makes salvation itself suspect when we honestly assess our imperfections."[335]

"Be disciplined" messages are similar to "be good" messages, however these communications advocate that believers practice means of grace like Bible reading, praying, or going to church more regularly and passionately. Chapel notes,

> Such preachers intone, "Pray more, read the Bible more, go to church more, and have better quiet times with God." If pressed to explain these exhortations theologically, few would actually say that they believe the practice of these Christian disciplines earns believers extra points with God. Few, however, will argue with the parishioner who says, "I had a terrible day today. This always seems to happen when I get up too late for my quiet time."[336]

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[333] Chapell, 293.

[334] Ibid., 289-295.

[335] Ibid., 291.

[336] Ibid., 292.

Chapell's bottom line on "be" preaching is fairly straightforward and instructive. "*'Be' messages are not wrong in themselves; they are wrong by themselves*."[337] There is certainly a place for drawing on biblical examples, for moral exhortation, and for calls to discipline in preaching. Preaching a christocentric worldview, however, means that preachers must remember, "Since we cannot be anything that God would approve of apart from his sanctifying mercy and power, grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior."[338]

The preaching literature also warned against the danger of improperly disclosing Christ. Bryan Chapell noted three improper ways of preaching Christ. First, he warns against "imaginative leapfrogging" from the text to the person and work of Jesus through the use of wordplay.[339] Second, he notes the danger of seeking Christ's presence in every Old Testament text through the use of textual details as "a direct reference to Jesus' incarnation or atoning work—regardless of a text's statements or purpose."[340] Third, he warns that "[M]ere reflection on an aspect of Jesus' nature or an event from his life is *not* an adequate explanation of a passage's meaning as it relates to him" apart from reflection on the atonement and/or God's gracious provision in Christ.[341] That is, Christ-centered preaching requires more than simply reporting something about Jesus in a sermon.

Another improper way to disclose Christ is through allegory. Edmund Clowney relates this problem as when an Old Testament event or institution is explained by "an

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[337] Ibid., 294.

[338] Ibid. For more examples of warnings against moralistic preaching see also Greidanus, 161-166; Clowney, 32-34; Goldsworthy, 118-119; Johnson, 230-234.

[339] Chapell, 301.

[340] Ibid., 302.

[341] Ibid., 303.

interpretation that is unrelated to the context or its meaning."[342] Clowney gives the example of a sermon that references a lamp in 2 Kings 4:10 and thus focuses on the Prophet Elisha's need for light, making various applications "using the text as an excuse for a thematic message on spiritual light form Genesis to Revelation, using, no doubt, the lampstand in the tabernacle, and so forth."[343] Sidney Greidanus shares this concern about the danger of allegory in christocentric preaching. He describes allegory as a type of interpretation in which preachers "move beyond the literal, historical meaning of a passage to a supposed deeper sense."[344] Greidanus observes that this was the predominant interpretive approach employed in preaching Christ from the Old Testament from the third century to the sixteenth.[345] The problem with allegorical interpretation is that it lacks the guardrail of the original author's intent and thus opens up the text and the sermon to arbitrary and subjective interpretations and applications. [346]

These challenges identified by the literature focus on interpretation rather than on the preaching event or the congregation. Still, two primary challenges identified were moralism and allegory.

Practices and Issues that Aid Christocentric Worldview Preaching

In addition to knowing the challenges, this study examined practices that help promote a christocentric worldview through preaching. The literature discusses practices that enable the preacher to connect the sermon with the text, the redemptive narrative

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[342] Clowney, 34.

[343] Ibid.

[344] Greidanus, 70.

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid., 90.

with the lived realities of their congregations, and the preacher with the Christ of a christocentric worldview.

As noted earlier, a core commitment is that the christocentric worldview is framed by the redemptive-historical story of the Bible. The literature offers help in this task. Goldsworthy offers a sketch of the epochs of salvation history.[347] The preacher can also locate the preaching text in Goldsworthy's four-fold structure of salvation history: (1) Creation/Fall and prologue to Salvation History, (2) Abraham to David and Solomon (positive history revealing the nature of redemption and the Kingdom of God), (3) David/Solomon to Christ (negative history of Israel and Judah under judgment and the positive prophetic anticipation of salvation and the coming kingdom), and (4) Christ to second coming (Jesus fulfillment of all the expectations of the Old Testament).[348]

Bryan Chapell provides three approaches that help the preacher connect the text to the theological setting of the story and help reveal the redemptive truths of a given text. These are "text disclosure," whereby a text makes a direct reference to Christ, "type disclosure," in which the work in Christ is evident in Old Testament types, and "context disclosure," in which a preacher identifies "where a passage fits in the overall revelation of God's redemptive plan" in relation to one or more of four redemptive foci. These foci may be predictive of the work of Christ, preparatory for the work of Christ, reflective of the work of Christ, or resultant of the work of Christ.[349] Because a person's worldview commitments result from encountering Christ, Chapell explains, "The goal of the

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[347] "It is important to identify whether the text relates to epoch A (The Kingdom revealed in Israel's history), epoch B (the kingdom revealed in prophetic eschatology), or epoch C (New Testament witness to the kingdom revealed in Christ)." Goldsworthy, 139.

[348] Ibid., 104.

[349] Ibid., see diagram 6, p. 109.

preacher is not to find novel ways of identifying Christ in every text (or naming Jesus in every sermon) but to show how each text manifests God's grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ."[350]

Additionally, preachers must aid contemporary hearers in locating themselves within the biblical redemptive story between Jesus and the new creation. In other words, the redemptive story is not only about those who lived far away, long ago in "Bible times," it is the story of those people who live today as well. This means that christocentric worldview preaching should follow the path from the text to Christ and from Christ to the hearer.[351] Goldsworthy identifies this as the critical step in keeping a Christ-centered focus and forming a christocentric worldview. For, as Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen explain in their book *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, "Biblical theology shows that the essence of hermeneutics lies in the fact that every part of the Bible leads to Christ, and thus to the believer who is in Christ."[352]

Not only must christocentric worldview preaching connect the sermon and its text with the redemptive story, christocentric worldview preachers also need to connect the redemptive narrative with the lived realities of their congregants. First, the literature emphasizes means of recognizing connecting points with modern day reality. Greidanus

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[350] Chapell, 281-288.

[351] Ibid., 279. Other excellent resources for understanding the place of contemporary hearers within the redemptive story of the Bible include Goldsworthy, 117.

[352] Bartholomew and Goheen; Wright; Williams; Wolters.

advises his readers to select a text "with an eye to congregational needs."[353] Elsewhere Greidanus elaborates:

> For more specific needs one has to exegete the congregation and the culture in which it lives. Together with the elders one may detect such needs as confusion and doubt about the Christian faith, fear of the future, a lack of active involvement in God's coming kingdom, a lack of trust in God, a lack of assurance of salvation, a lack of love for each other, a lack of concern to promote justice in the land, a lack of knowledge about God and his will, the temptations on contemporary idols, illness, stress, sorrow, anger, and a host of other needs.[354]

Unfortunately, Greidanus does not return to the topic of congregational needs in a substantive way that instructs the preacher how to go from the study to the pulpit and from the pulpit to the congregation's worldview. Chapell offers practical help in his discussion of motives and means of change. He says, "Nowhere are the effects of Christ-centered exposition more apparent than when preachers apply biblical truths to everyday life."[355] He goes on to list "motives for obedience that allow grace responses to take priority over self-protection or self-promotion," including responding to Christ's love, adulation of the mercy of God in Christ, love for others loved by God, and a proper love for self in Christ. [356] Additionally, Chapell helpfully addresses the need for Christ-centered preachers to connect their congregations with means for worldview change, warning that "Applications of biblical truth are not complete until a preacher explains how to plug in to the power God provides."[357] Chapell offers means (such as prayer,

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[353] Greidanus, 128.

[354] Greidanus, 281. See also Greidanus, 125.

[355] Greidanus, 281.

[356] Chapell, 320.

[357] Ibid., 320, 320-323.

scripture, and church attendance) as one way to plug into God's power, and he offers faith as the other way:

> As redemptive sermons lead people to understand the lack of their own ability to be or do what God requires, preachers naturally lead listeners to a confession of their need for God. This most basic and humble of Christian postures is the essential path to divine power. In our humility, we do not trust in the power of our performance but rely on the truth of what God has promised.[358]

Zach Eswine's book on Christ-centered preaching offers the most assistance for preachers who wish to connect a christocentric worldview with the listener. Eswine suggests that preachers identify the real life concerns of the text that reveal how the text addresses reality. To do this, he provides a practical tool that he calls the "COR" of the text, or "Context of Reality" addressed by the text, which he says is "the mutual life environment that contemporary believers and unbelievers share in common with those to or about whom the biblical text was written that teaches us about the nature of reality."[359] Chapell suggests that preachers identify what he calls the "Fallen Condition Focus"[360] (FCF) of the passage and of the preacher's sermon.[361] Chapell's FCF aids the preacher in identifying spiritual concerns of the text that are shared by the contemporary congregation. Chapell offers three questions for the preacher to develop the FCF statement: (1) what does the text say? (2) What spiritual concern(s) did the text address (in its context)? and (3) What spiritual concerns do listeners share in common with those to (or about) whom the text was written?[362] Fabarez advocates identifying the unchanging

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[358] Ibid., 323.

[359] Ibid., 325.

[360] Eswine, 28.

[361] "The mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him." Chapell, 50.

[362] Ibid., 48-55.

human condition by asking of the original recipients, "What was this text intended to change in their lives?" and then asking, "What should this text change in my life, and in my congregants' lives?"[363] According to Fabarez, this process helps the preacher identify the "unchanging human condition," [364] thus enabling the preacher to preach Christ to "the desperate need we cannot meet ourselves."[365]

Eswine expands on Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus, noting the Fallen Condition Focus "identifies one's inner tendency toward temptation and evil."[366] However, Eswine believes that Chapell's FCF fits best within churched contexts.[367] Given the religious setting in the United States today, Eswine suggests adding three more FCF strategies—a Finite Condition Focus, a Fragile Condition Focus, and a Faltering Condition Focus. For Eswine "Not every expression of man's broken condition is because of moral evil."[368] Thus, the Finite Condition Focus addresses human needs that arise from the limitations of being human – "limits of knowledge, understanding, emotional capacity, or physical ability."[369] Second, a Fragile Condition Focus provides the preacher with the means of addressing needs that arise from being sinned against or experiencing the general effects of sin in a fallen and broken world.[370] Third, Eswine's Faltering Condition Focus addresses the faltering that can occur when people live in tension between what they

[363] Fabarez, 39.

[364] Ibid.

[365] Ibid., 120.

[366] Ibid.

[367] Eswine.

[368] Ibid., 45.

[369] Ibid.

[370] Ibid., 46.

know is true and what actual living requires of truth.[371] Eswine contends that if preachers have all four conditions at their disposal, they will be better enabled to identify the human dilemma of the text and the congregation, thus paving the way to show God's provision in that dilemma, underscoring a key commitment of the christocentric worldview.[372]

Eswine also offers helpful insights regarding areas of life that christocentric worldview preaching must address, but which are often unnoticed, ignored, or even avoided. First, preaching must address and expose sensitive issues that are a part of the daily lives of the congregation members' lives, so that those issues may be reshaped by a christocentric worldview. Eswine urges his readers, "Identify those areas of reality that a preacher does not talk about and you will discover those spheres of reality that people are daily trying to navigate without the light of God's Word." [373] He calls these areas of reality the "expository ban," as they are aspects of life "that we tend to avoid or that are culturally forbidden to mention from the pulpit. Sexuality, emotions, famines, joys tsunamis, celebrations, dreams, promotions, murders, crime victims, cancer survivors, and injustice are part of everyday life, but we avoid them."[374] Five common ways preachers avoid these aspects are through censoring, muting, equivocating, evicting, and cynicism.[375]

In addition to addressing sensitive areas of life, Eswine also writes that christocentric worldview preaching will provide thoughtful and robust thinking on

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[371] Ibid., 47.

[372] Ibid., 48.

[373] Ibid., 50.

[374] Ibid., 30-31.

[375] Ibid.

complex issues rather than merely offering what he calls "simplism."[376] Instead of simplistic solutions to life's intricate problems, which are devoid of nuance or understanding, Eswine advocates facing the issue and embracing reality:

> But the wise realize the faithful can fall to pieces and the unfaithful can flourish. The good are capable of evil and the unrighteous can do right and good things. The church can get it wrong while those outside of the church get it right, and vice versa. The right political party can be on the wrong side of an issue while the wrong political party can make the right stand.[377]

Furthermore, christocentric worldview preaching accounts for the goodness of God's creation and his work to recover that created goodness. This approach recognizes the mutual human nobility of being made in the image of God. Eswine says, "We use the word *fall* because something once stood. We use the word *ruin* only because something good and beautiful once existed."[378] Preaching these "echoes of creation" communicates with Christians and non-Christians alike because it identifies "the fallen schemes that the human heart seeks" as the result of living in a world created good but ruined by sin.[379] Preaching with the creational echoes of a christocentric worldview also helps the preacher advocate what Eswine calls "substantial healing," wherein he addresses "the four basic spheres of reality—God, people, place and self."[380] Apologist Francis Schaefer notes:

> First of all man is separated from God; second he is separated from himself (thus the psychological problems of life); third, he is separated from other men (thus the sociological problems of life); fourth, he is separated from nature (thus the

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[376] Ibid.

[377] Ibid., 39.

[378] Ibid.

[379] Ibid., 43.

[380] Ibid.

> problems of living in this world—for example the ecological problems). All these need healing.[381]

The ability to understand and address the complex landscape in which congregations live today and to set that landscape in its creational substantial redemptive context is an important practice for preachers communicating a christocentric worldview.

Not only must the preacher and the listener be connected to the text, preachers must also be connected to the Christ of a christocentric worldview. Clowney believes that Christ-centered preaching requires the preacher's reflective study of God's word as the means of entering the Lord's presence.[382] Time preparing with the Lord in prayer and seeking his presence in the preaching event, trusting that he is there and that he speaks to the people before the preacher does, is another characteristic of Christ-centered preaching for Clowney.[383]

Further, according to Clowney, christocentric worldview preaching "is not an automatic product of an abstract hermeneutic method (though it entails sound interpretive principles and practices) but rather grows from a heart that feasts daily in fellowship with the Savior through his Word."[384] Indeed, Johnson elsewhere draws on the example of the Apostle Paul, who found his sufficiency to preach, not in his own education, eloquence, intelligence, or status, but in the power of God. He remarks, "Preachers like Paul, who realize their own desperate need and the Spirit's almighty power, will saturate their

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[381] Ibid., 42. In Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, 2nd ed., The Complete Works of Francis a Schaeffer, vol. 5 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 263.

[382] Eswine, 42.

[383] Clowney, 48.

[384] Ibid., 58.

ministry of the Word with prayer—for hearers, themselves and each other—and will urgently seek the support of others' prayers."[385]

Bryan Chapell warns against preachers' neglect of their own spiritual lives. He emphasizes that it is the work of the holy spirit that affects the "hidden recesses of the human will," and not the effort of the preacher. Because of this reality, preachers require the same dependence on Christ in their preaching that they advocate as a core commitment of a christocentric worldview for the congregation. Chapell observes, "We should not expect our words to acquaint others with the power of the Spirit if we have not met with him…Neglect of prayer signals serious deficiencies in a ministry even if other signs of success have not diminished."[386] Thus the literature argues that the preacher must have an active devotional life in order to effectively preach a christocentric worldview.

Preliminary Conclusions on Christ-centered Preaching Literature

Having surveyed worldview and sociological literature, this literature review has considered how preaching might be a means for cultivating a christocentric worldview in the current American religious and cultural context. This review surveyed Christ-centered preaching literature to discover, first, core christocentric worldview commitments that preaching should communicate. Current scholarship advocates preaching the redemptive-historical story, emphasizes dependence on Christ, and seeks deep change in the listener. Second, the effectiveness of preaching as a medium for communicating those commitments is found in the power, authority, and confidence provided by expository preaching. Challenges pastors might encounter in this task, though limited in the

[385] Johnson, ed., 10.

[386] Johnson, 92.

literature, include a temptation toward moralism and allegory in preaching Christ. Finally, practices that aid christocentric worldview preaching include connecting the sermon with the text, connecting the redemptive narrative with the lived life realities of the congregation, and connecting the preacher with the Christ of a christocentric worldview.

Preliminary Conclusions Based on the Literature Reviewed

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate a christocentric worldview among their congregations through preaching. The literature selected for review was intended to provide insight on this question from four distinct perspectives found in biblical literature, worldview literature, sociological literature, and Christ-centered preaching literature. To answer the research questions more fully, it was necessary to interview practitioners in the field, the endeavor to which this study now turns.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching. The preceding review of current literature provides insight regarding a definition of worldview, the current religious context in America, and the core commitments of Christ-centered preaching. However, none of the scholarly literature reviewed directly addresses the issue raised in this study. While the literature that comes closest to addressing the issue is that on homiletics, this tends to focus on the preacher rather than on the congregation. To fill that gap, this study reports on the findings of interviews with practicing preachers who attempt to cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching.

Design of the Study

This basis of this study was the qualitative research method. Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* describes qualitative research studies as "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."[387] The qualitative case study is an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit."[388] Merriam identifies four key

[387] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Revised and Expanded ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

[388] Ibid.

characteristics of qualitative research: "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive."[389]

The qualitative method was used in this study because it allows practitioners to speak for themselves, using their own words and sharing their convictions and practices. As Merriam says, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how the construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences."[390] Second, the qualitative approach allows for the gathering of different perspectives to inform the research. Using the constant comparative method of data analysis allows the researcher to compare the emic perspectives of the study participants "comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences."[391] Third, qualitative research allows the researcher to engage first hand with the study participants, to see them in their environments and to tailor the interviews depending on the responses of the study participants. Merriam notes, "Qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field."[392]

Participant Sample

This study involved interviews with six pastors who met the following criteria: at least five years of preaching experience, currently employed in a weekly preaching role,

[389] Ibid., 27.

[390] Ibid., 5.

[391] Ibid., 30.

[392] Ibid., 15.

aged thirty-five or older, self-identified Christ-centered preachers, and based in California. The rationale for these criteria is discussed below.

Each preacher interviewed had at least five years of preaching ministry experience. The research topic goes beyond the basics of preaching practices, and thus it was necessary to limit the participants to pastors who have refined their preaching through practice. This refining through time provided greater likelihood that the participants would have at least started to develop their own "voice" in preaching, and that they would have had a few years to reflect on their own philosophy of preaching that forms a christocentric worldview.

Second, interviewing pastors who preach on a weekly basis provided the opportunity for the study participants to draw on fresh and a current thinking regarding their practice. Similarly, participants were able to draw on current examples of their preaching practices in their responses.

Third, each interviewee was above the age of thirty-five. This enabled the researcher to focus on practitioners with enough life experience to have a greater maturity in their thinking. As the study focused on understanding what practitioners actually do in their efforts to cultivate a Christ-centered worldview among their congregations, greater life experience on the part of the interviewees benefited the study.

Fourth, preachers for this study were not all of the same denomination, but they did all self-identify as Christ-centered preachers. Because a christocentric worldview was inherent to the research questions and the focus of the study, the pastors needed to be familiar with the stream of literature and thinking that exists regarding Christ-centered

preaching. The goal of the study was to take these already familiar concepts[393] and examine how they are fleshed out among church congregations.

Finally, the pastors all come from California, as it is within drivable distance of the researcher. The researcher conducted the interviews face-to-face, which allowed him to benefit from experiencing the participants in their own environments and to observe firsthand their tone, body language, and facial expressions during the interviews. California covers a variety of demographic settings, which provides insight into the ways preachers cultivate christocentric worldview across a broader spectrum, thus broadening the applicability of the research. California also represents a part of the United States where the Christ-centered approach is less common among pastors, thus strengthening the research through insight from those who self-consciously practice this approach in their preaching, despite being in a minority position.

To maintain anonymity, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. William, James, John, and Richard are all ordained teaching elders in the Presbyterian Church in America. Michael is an ordained Grace Brethren pastor. Robert is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Free Church of America, serving in an independent Bible church. Richard serves as a campus minister. However, in this role he preaches to a large group of students weekly in the same way that he would were he preaching to a church congregation. One participant, James, did not match the criteria in that he is not the preaching pastor at his church. However, he has four years' experience serving as an interim pastor with the primary preaching responsibilities. Additionally, in his current

[393] Using words that make sense to the interviewee, words that reflect the respondent's world view, will improve the quality of data obtained during the interview." Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 312. Quoted in Merriam, 95.

role as Executive Pastor, he preaches five to six times per quarter, meaning that he is currently engaged in active preaching ministry. While ideally every interviewee would meet every criterion, James' prior experience and active engagement in the task at hand makes his perspective a helpful resource to this study, even though he does not fit the ideal.

Data Collection

This study employed a semi-structured interview protocol as the primary data collection method. The semi-structured interview utilizes a format that provides for the collection of specific information from each interview respondent, while also providing flexibility in the interview regarding the exact wording and question order.[394] The open-ended nature of the interview questions facilitated the researcher's ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues in order to explore them more thoroughly. As Merriam puts it, "less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways."[395] Ultimately, these methods enabled the researcher to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants. To explore how preachers cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations, the researcher employed an interview protocol based on the following research questions:[396]

1. What christocentric worldview commitments should preaching communicate to a congregation?

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[394] Merriam, 90.

[395] Ibid.

[396] An interview guide was employed, and is available in Appendix A. It should be noted that while research questions and interview questions do not need to be so closely aligned in a qualitative approach, in this case the research questions formed a framework for the kinds of information the researcher sought to uncover through the interviews.

2. How effective is preaching as a medium for communicating christocentric worldview commitments in a congregation?

3. What preaching practices promote christocentric worldview commitments in a congregation?

4. What challenges do preachers encounter in cultivating christocentric worldview commitments in their congregations?

The interview protocol was field tested to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature, but they evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged through constant comparison analysis during the interviewing process. Prior to the interview, each pastor received a letter explaining the purpose of the research, a consent form, and the protocol questions to be asked. Interviews were recorded digitally, and the researcher made notations during the interview regarding word choice, participant behavior, and connections to other sources. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a third party and edited for accuracy by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method. Concerning this method, Merriam writes, "Basically the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data."[397] The researcher contacted thirteen potential participants via email to request their participation in the study. Of those contacted, six agreed to participate and be interviewed. The pastors who were interviewed self-identify as reformed, and they

[397] Merriam, 14.

minister in three denominational contexts: The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, and an independent Bible church. The researcher traveled to the pastors' ministry locations throughout California – one in Los Angeles County, two in a college town on the central coast of California, two in the Sacramento suburbs, and one in the Silicon Valley/southern bay area – and interviewed the participants in their offices, with the exception of one who chose to do it over lunch at his favorite lunch restaurant.

After interviewing each pastor, the researcher had the digital recording transcribed by a third party. The researcher then edited the transcribed text by comparing it with the recording to ensure accuracy in the transcription. The researcher coded and categorized the data according to themes and patterns that emerged in the process of analysis, as outlined by the constant-comparative method. The themes and patterns were then reported as findings in chapter four of the current study.

Researcher Position

Three factors that affected the researcher's stance are worthy of mention. First, the researcher pastored for nearly ten years in local church ministry and has a great deal of practical experience attempting to communicate a christocentric worldview to his congregation through preaching. Second, the researcher has a bias that favors Christ-centered preaching over other approaches to preaching. However, it will be noted that as the literature review should demonstrate, the researcher is willing to learn from alternative perspectives. Third, the researcher believes that Christian preachers have been given the unchanging message of the gospel of Jesus Christ – his life, death and resurrection – to deliver to a world that is constantly changing. This means that the

content for delivery is non-negotiable for the researcher, while the methods and forms of communication are open to modification.

The researcher's experience as a practitioner of Christ-centered preaching should afford him the ability to observe the emic nuances of an insider. While excluding various preaching approaches, the researcher is primarily interested in how one who is committed to Christ-centered preaching principles handles this issue.

Study Limitations

Due to limited time and resources, six pastors were interviewed for this study. All interview participants minister in California where the researcher resides. Because all of the interviewees are male, a result of the ecclesiastical traditions of the interviewees, this study will be limited by the absence of female perspectives.[398]

The focus of this study is not on preaching practices in a general sense, but is limited to the practices of those who adhere to what is variously called Christ-centered preaching, grace-focused preaching, gospel-centered preaching, and various other less common labels. The researcher focused on those characteristics of preaching that make it Christ-centered, and especially on the facets of preaching that cultivate a Christ-centered worldview among the listening congregation. Thus, the research largely assumes practices that make for good preaching or communication generally. Similarly, while there is a great deal that the researcher could say about the general importance of expositional preaching, hermeneutical practices, the value of rhetorical soundness, general relevance to the listener, delivery, and other important aspects of preaching, such issues are not under consideration here.

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[398] It should be noted that the denomination and tradition of the interview participants limit ordination of the preaching offices to males.

Summary of Project Methodology

While the interviews were conducted in California, the ministry contexts varied considerably and included a transitional area of Los Angeles County, the Silicon Valley/Southern Bay Area, suburban Sacramento, and a small college town. This means that many of this study's findings may be generalized to other similar preaching contexts in the United States and potentially other parts of the world. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions on how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies of this nature, the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.[399] The results of this study may also have implications for other aspects of ministry, such as small groups or counseling.

[399] Merriam, 303.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In order to explore how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching, this study included interviews with six pastors. The pastors self-identify as reformed and all minister in California—one in Los Angeles County, two from a college town on the central coast of California, two from the Sacramento suburbs, and one in the Silicon Valley/southern bay area. To maintain anonymity, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. William, James, John, and Richard are all ordained teaching elders in the PCA. Michael is an ordained Grace Brethren pastor. Robert is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Free Church of America, serving in an independent Bible church. As noted in the previous chapter, one participant, Richard serves as a campus minister. Another participant, James, while not fully matching the criteria, nevertheless offers a valuable contribution to this study. The interviews were intended to explore the following four research questions:

1. What christocentric worldview commitments should preaching communicate to a congregation?

2. How effective is preaching as a medium for communicating christocentric worldview commitments in a congregation?

3. What practices aid the preaching of christocentric worldview commitments in a congregation?

4. What challenges do pastors encounter in preaching christocentric worldview commitments in their congregations?

The following discussion reports the findings of the researcher, and it is organized around the themes of the four research questions.

Christocentric Worldview Commitments

The first research question asked what Christ-centered worldview commitments pastors want their preaching to communicate to their congregations. They key question was, "As a preacher, what Christ-centered worldview commitments do you want your preaching to communicate to your congregation?" Secondary prompts expanded the interviewees' answers about preaching goals and christocentric worldview topics best handled outside of preaching. In the course of the interviews, the pastors referenced some common goals for their congregations in response to their preaching for Christ-centered worldview commitments.

Christ Dependency

Each of the pastors interviewed expressed a desire to see their congregation members grow in their dependency on Christ. Both William and James used the terminology of "Christ dependency" in their interviews. William spoke of dependency on Christ as interchangeable with the view that God's grace is the motivating force and means by which God sanctifies his people:

> Dependency on Christ, just the law-gospel distinction, we are perniciously wedded to this notion that we have to live up to, or earn something, or deserve something…When a lot of us think of grace in…our redemptive relationship with God, we think, "Okay, grace is what sort of got me in. But now, I have to sort of keep my place. I have to keep up. I have to work. I have to strive." I'm aware of the debates swirling around this point right now. I place myself squarely on the side that says, "You will never progress into holiness unless you stop trying to be holy."

William's desire to cultivate dependence on the grace of Christ is a central emphasis in his preaching. "It's very, very important to me in preaching…we rely purely on grace,

both at the moment that he brings us into his family and from every moment thereon. I feel like we need to be reminded of that over and over and over and over again because we constantly forget."

The way James articulated his desire to cultivate dependence on Christ in his congregation is by regularly asking the metaphorical question, "Whose hand is someone holding when they leave the room?" After confronting many issues in people's lives through sermons, from lifestyles to idolatry to false worship, James wants to be sure he leaves his congregation with Jesus' healing power rather than a need for self-effort "because he's the life-giver, and at the end of the day [I want to make sure] they're not left in their own stuff."

John similarly prioritizes dependence on Christ as a commitment he cultivates among his congregation, "Our goal has to be the transformation of the hearer through the powerful work of Christ who's alive today, and by his Spirit wants to bring transformation right where we live." One of the goals of his preaching is to see his congregation members experience the change that occurs when their lives are empowered by Christ. John accomplishes this by preaching in a way that facilitates his congregants' decision-making process for the their lives, "They have to respond to God and make decisions based on what Jesus Christ has done for them and who Jesus Christ wants to be for them, and how Jesus Christ wants to empower them by His Spirit." Thus, while not using the term "Christ dependency," one core christocentric worldview commitment John cultivates is a dependence on Christ in the everyday matters of life.

Robert also discussed Christ dependency as a primary christocentric worldview commitment he strives to cultivate. Robert wants God's grace to challenge the personal

agendas of his congregation. “I don’t want to motivate people by guilt…I think grace is the ultimate motivator. So, I want people to be overwhelmed and captivated by grace and have that be the means by which they let go of their idols, or give, or serve, or sacrifice.” For Robert, dependence on God’s grace in Christ is the means by which people change. For this reason, grace is an emphasis of his preaching. He also clarified that he is careful to watch for moralistic motivation in his preaching because it does not produce changed lives among his congregation:

> I’m really sensitive to moralistic guilt because I think I can generate a lot of activity. I can get people to give. I can get people to serve in the short run. A whip is really effective, but I don’t want to do that in my parenting and I don’t want to do that in my pastoring. I just don’t think that changes human hearts.

Robert sees grace motivation as the answer to a preaching approach that focuses merely on behavior and morality. He expressed that while he knows this approach often lacks showy results in the short term, he believes the resulting changes last.

Each of these interview participants connected their view of Christ dependency in terms that equated with a dependency on God’s grace. The notable outlier was Michael, who went out of his way to challenge the idea that grace is the leading trait of a Christ-centered worldview commitment. He said he once held that view, but has shifted his view since. While agreeing that grace is important, he believes there is a terminology problem with equating a grace-focus and a Christ-centered focus:

> My own sense of understanding the gospel, I mean it originally started with kind of an anti-moralism, anti-legalism response that then said the gospel is about grace, and it certainly is. But if you read the text of scripture, you see the text of scripture is really intended to reveal God’s overarching purpose in human history. It finds its apex in the person of Jesus Christ. But Jesus isn’t just someone who comes into the world just to die and to rise again for our sin; rather he comes to reveal what God is like. So we get the most definitive revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, which you would expect because he’s God incarnate. So, to have a “Christ-centered worldview” is to see that the world has a trajectory. It

> is revealed to us from God in the pages of scripture. It finds its fulfillment and its trajectory – the climax of it is in Jesus. So, that's where the Christ-centered part comes in.

A couple issues are worth noting in Michael's view, as he is the one who objected to dependency on Christ's grace as a primary commitment of a christocentric worldview. Frist, he does not deny the importance of grace. Rather, he objects to the view that a Christ-centered perspective stops there. Second, he emphasizes the historical trajectory of redemptive history that focuses on Jesus as the apex of history. Based on the literature review and comments of the other pastors interviewed, it seems fair to say that Michael is objecting to a particular expression of a grace focus rather than to the importance of grace as a whole. As examples, he referenced Tim Keller's hermeneutic as expressed in his preaching as being too simplistic, and he believes that Edmund Clowney over utilizes typology. His concern is that it is important to approach the text and preaching with an understanding that "The canon unfolds and has a historicity to it, and because we are on this side of it we can look back and we can see there are things that certainly anticipate Christ." Thus, while Michael's objection to a grace focus is notable, it amounts to a nuanced methodological distinction rather than a denial of the importance of grace per se.

The One True Story

Another Christ-centered worldview commitment the pastors attempt to foster is a congregational commitment to the Christian story as "The one true story of the world," as William put it. Important elements of this commitment include the Reformed framework of "creation, fall, redemption;" the historical nature of the Christian faith focused on Jesus; and the conviction that God is working through the timeline of history to bring about the redemption of all things.

The interviewees repeatedly emphasized the biblical story as the one, true story that stands in contrast with the various cultural stories that their congregations tend to live by. William said, "The gospel makes the best sense of the world we live in. That means that to the extent that a team of sociologists from Princeton discovers something true about human nature, we got to expect that to resonate with the gospel and affirm it when it does." Richard wants his students to understand that life is framed by the story in which God is creator, and humans are created by God and for God. Everything else flows out of that fundamental worldview commitment. The rest of their beliefs, goals, and relationships must reference this starting point.

Another aspect of the commitment to the one true story is that this is the true story of history. That is, the gospel story occurred in time and space and continues today in the lives of their congregation members. Michael, for example emphasized the importance of understanding that Christ is the center of history and that history has a trajectory that is headed somewhere. John expressed this idea saying that a Christ-centered worldview includes:

> …a timeline in which all things are redeemed. So a Christ-centered worldview to me means that Christ is at work. Christ is at work bringing people to himself and preparing to renew the whole world and renew the creation as described in Romans 8 and Revelation 21-22. So that's the heart of a Christ-centered worldview, as I understand it.

Robert added that he wants his congregation to understand the gospel as the big story of history and to see their individual stories as bound up in God's story.

A number of the pastors shared Robert's concern that their congregations understand how the story of the gospel applies to them today. For James it is important that his congregation sees Christ as the focal point of the whole story of scripture, and

that they are able to apply the story of Christ to their lives today. John emphasized his earnest desire for his congregation to work out their worldview in the mundane things of life, sharing, “My desire is for people to leave a worship service and be motivated to resolve issues with their wife and their husband; that the peace of Christ might reign in their hearts so that they could be called to unity, mutual submission and care for the persons who are closest in their family.”

Addresses All of Life

Another significant theme among the pastors interviewed is the idea that their congregations are committed to working out their Christ-centered worldview in every area of life. This theme has two specific trajectories: a commitment to God’s cosmic plan of redemption of all things and a commitment to the application of this worldview in every area of the individual’s life in the here and now.

The theme of congregational commitment to God’s plan of the redemption of all things ran throughout the interviews. William said that a Christ-centered worldview “gets at the kind of the Dutch reformed, kind of Kuyperian pre-imminence of Christ over all things, which gets at the worldview angle that wherever you, whatever you do, Jesus is there, over it, redeeming it.” Similarly, James offhandedly remarked that a Kuyperian “sphere sovereignty” – God’s redemption of the whole world – is an important commitment. John also emphasized the cosmic picture that Christ is redeeming all things, saying, “So a Christ-centered worldview to me means that Christ is at work. Christ is at work bringing people to Himself and preparing to renew the whole world and renew the creation as described in Romans 8 and Revelation 21-22. So that’s the heart of a Christ-centered worldview as I understand it.”

Coming at the same issue in a different way, Michael emphasized that the world has a trajectory that has Jesus as the climax – especially to restore God's presence with his people. To illustrate what he meant, he expanded on the theme of God's presence and articulated his view of the way in which God is redeeming the whole world:

> For example, the issue of the presence of God, God is present with Adam and Eve in the garden. Adam and Eve rebel, humanity is affected by that. So, from that point on you have these movements of God towards humanity to reestablish his presence with them, with humanity. So you have the tabernacle, you have the temple. The question is can we rebuild this temple? How can God be present with us again when we are in exile? Where is God? You come out of this four hundred years and then you have this announcement that his name will be Emmanuel, which is "God with us." So you have the reestablishment of the presence of God with man. By the time you finish the book of Revelation you have again this unfolding of heaven and earth coming together and God once again being with us. To me that is where I start seeing this Christ-centeredness, I see these things finding their resolution both in Christ and because of Christ.

The theme of congregational commitment to the application of this worldview in every area of the individual's life also ran throughout the interviews. For example, a number of the pastors said that it is important for their congregants to be able to understand their life circumstances in light of a Christ-centered worldview. Robert said, "My job as a pastor is to help people understand that, help people get that, help people live that, help them see all of their life circumstances, their entire lives centered around Christ as well." Similarly James remarked,

> We thought kind of a rotation that we would follow that would get us in all different types of scripture so that you're seeing Christ throughout the whole of the story of salvation, providing some variety to that, providing an opportunity for folks to look in creative way. In doing that, it gives you an opportunity to speak about different life circumstances, not only within the original heroes but also extrapolated to the context that we're presently in Northern California.

John talked about his desire to provide opportunities through his preaching to make new decisions about how to live their lives:

> Very specifically, creating opportunities for turning points in people's lives, for helping decision makers make new decisions that are based on a Christ-centered worldview, which means Christ is my lord, Christ is the one I show allegiance to. How can I make decisions based on what's going on in my life and my world that will impact the rest of today and tomorrow?

John went on to explain that it is important to him that his congregation be able apply his preaching to the mundane and everyday aspects of their lives. "I think it's not been a successful sermon if somebody says, 'That was great preaching,' and then walks out and curses their wife. Somehow what I wanted to get through didn't get through. Of course they have their own responsibility, probably fueled by what they hear. It's in the small things. It's got to be in the small things."

In a slightly different vein, Michael reported that one of his primary goals is to see his congregation change the questions they ask about life. If their questions change to reflect a christocentric worldview, then they will be committed to applying that worldview where they live:

> This is where I'm a little bit strange. The barometer for me is the questions that they're asking about life. What are the questions that they're asking about life? Have the questions been changed because of what we're doing? My basis thesis – and I tell our congregation this – is that our lives are an answer to the questions that we're asking. We just don't articulate them because we don't stop to think about them. We're on autopilot, and largely we've inherited those questions from the culture because we live in the culture. We're like the forth that's boiling in the water pot, we just absorb it.

Michael wants to shift his congregation's questions from self-focused ones to inquiries about what God is doing in the world and how should they participate in his work.

William believes that when a christocentric worldview addresses all of life, it breaks down the divide between the sacred and the secular and seeing his congregation grow in living out their calling in all walks of life:

> I don't just mean the job you have, although for a lot of us, that's a big part of that. I'm reminded that Dorothy Sayers says that for a long time, the church told the carpenter that the main claim of his religion on him was not to drink and show up for church on Sunday morning. She said, "We ought to be telling the carpenter that the main claim of his Christian faith on him is to make good tables." So then, I want our journalists to know that they're doing good. Journalism is an act of faith, on behalf of carpenters in our thing. So I think that illustration is apt for our folks. But I want our people…so this is one aspect to your question.
>
> I want our people to know that there is no part of life that can't be done as a genuine and sincere act of faithful obedience, and if you want to call it this religious duty or trust or responsive love to God, that there is no second-class domain or spheres, Kuyper talked about spheres, and that this one is not better than the other. What I do is no more spiritually significant or redemptively significant than what they do. It's just that I happen to work for the church and they happen to work for a public school or jewelry company.

A Matter of the Heart

Finally, as was seen in the literature review, the pastors view christocentric worldview commitments as an orientation of the heart. William, reflecting on times when he has not seen his congregation adopt a christocentric worldview as readily as he would like, noted that the issue is the "core of people's hearts." He noted that preaching isn't about merely conveying facts, content, or doctrine. "Unless your heart has changed, unless you begin to see the world in a new way, you're just going to default right back to your old assumptions, and there's nothing that I or anybody else can do with that."

While James did not use the language of "heart change," he emphasized the importance, in his perspective, that Christ-centered preaching would produce "an awareness that you are more important than what you produce for God." Indeed, James went further, saying that his desire is to "help them [the congregation] by the preaching of the word to embrace all that God has called them to be and do, whatever that is." As he explained in his interview, these are ways in which his congregants' relationships with God are strengthened at the core. Richard mentioned his use of Bryan Chapell's Fallen

Condition Focus as a means of speaking to the heart, explaining, “I think establishing the FCF, the Fallen Condition Focus, is always grabbing something in our hearts and in our experience that sense the world wasn’t supposed to be like this. Then exploring the brokenness of it and then proclaiming Christ.”

Two of the pastors interviewed cited heart change as prime christocentric worldview commitment, and as their foremost goal in preaching. John mentioned this theme of preaching to the heart multiple times in his interview. At one point, John contrasted his understanding of Christ-centered worldview with that of those who write about curriculum in Christian schools and Christian colleges.

> Sometimes we think Christ-centered worldview, we think about those big things, that comes and goes and people have difference of opinion. But the real issue is what’s going on in our hearts, as we are loving God, wanting to serve our world and to do that together. That’s kind of my perspective on the Christ-centered worldview. That dominates my preaching.

Later in the interview, John became more passionate that his goal in preaching is in fact heart change rather than transferring content – whether it be systematic theological categories, preaching the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, or preaching through the catechism:

> That’s all well and good, but that’s not the goal. The goal is not to teach people the Bible. The goal is not to teach people our theology. The goal is not to cram their head full of facts. Our goal has to be the transformation of the heart through the powerful work of Christ who’s alive today and by his Spirit wants to bring transformation right where we live, in the little-bitty everyday things of life.

Michael also focused his response on the goal of heart change in his preaching. He clarified that his understanding of the term “worldview,” as used in the interview questions, while it includes content and a cognitive dimension, also includes the affections. He shared:

> As a communicator, I'm not simply attempting to shape the information, but to move into the arena of shaping affections as well. That's kind of Jonathan Edwards too where I recognize that my simply giving them good information, textually accurate information, comprehensive connections of the text and the overarching narrative, will in itself not create affections to desire to follow Jesus and be obedient to Jesus and love for Jesus. Now having said that, I recognize my limitations, and that's where the Spirit of God does come in. At the same time I'm going to try to include in my communication an attempt to engage the affections of people as well somehow. So that is on the radar for me as I prepare, as I pray over what I'm doing, as I pray for the people prior to going out there, is that I desire to have them desire not just know.

Preaching as a Medium

The second research question was intended to determine how pastors view preaching as a medium for communicating Christ-centered worldview commitments among their congregations. The key question asked on this topic was, "How does preaching lend itself to communicating the kinds of commitments you just shared?" This question was explored further by asking how preaching lends itself to communicating christocentric worldview commitments, what limits preaching, and what other communication means are more and less effective for communicating. This line of questioning prompted unexpected responses. The pastors shared that they see preaching as a limited but blessed means, that they experience freedom to speak while preaching, and that they believe the preacher embodies the message he communicates.

Preaching is a Limited but Blessed Means

A prominent and unexpected theme that emerged in the interviews is a view that preaching is a limited, outdated, and somewhat ineffective means of communication. Curiously, the pastors nevertheless believe in the power of preaching to communicate christocentric worldview commitments, as they believe that preaching is used of God.

Indeed, each pastor interviewed affirmed his belief that preaching is worth the effort spent in many hours of preparation and preaching each week.

First, regarding the limits of preaching, many of the pastors expressed some belief that preaching is an antiquated communication form. James stated this view clearly, noting that preaching is out of step culturally because "there's no other place on the planet or on a consistent weekly basis you sit and listen to somebody go for twenty to thirty minutes, no place." He asserted that most learning styles do not learn well from preaching. Robert also noted that it is very rare in today's American culture for someone to stand in front of a group of people and give a monologue for thirty to forty minutes. In his view, the lack of many other parallels[400] makes preaching a "unique and funky" medium. He also noted that in modern society, the word "preach" carries a negative connotation. Referencing the well-known Christian author C.S. Lewis as an example of someone within Christian circles who illustrates his point, he said, "It's interesting, I was reading *Mere Christianity* with some men, and preaching was used derogatorily often. Even C.S. Lewis did it, 'Well, I'm not preaching at you.' I'm like what the heck is wrong with preaching? It's what I do."

From a related but different angle, William said:

> I do believe that preaching is a hopeful, important, and limited…I mean, I don't believe that there's something magic about preaching. You get that sense if you read a lot of those, especially the old reformed people. It's almost as talismanic sort of thing. I think good teaching, and I've distinguished my teaching and preaching. I could tell you how if you wanted me to, but I think teaching gives you the opportunity to do things you just can't do [in preaching].

[400] Robert is in a college town and mentioned class lectures as an example of one parallel. John mentioned political speeches as another.

William believes some views of preaching are dated. In his view, modern theories of teaching and learning offer insight into other communication methods that are simply more effective in certain instances. He mentioned how teaching (in contrast with preaching) can better facilitate interaction, creative silence, and the use of media like film clips or displaying cartoons to prompt responses. In his view, these teaching tools are limited by people's assumptions about preaching, and thus not very useful.

Another limiting factor for preaching is the concern that it is easily reduced to bare content, lacking the affective dimension. James observed, "With the amount of radio, television and internet stuff that's available, I think there's some knots in the aspects about that in the sense that if somebody could …[conclude]…that they could do church apart from a community of faith and simply listen to content…that would not be helpful." James' observation highlights concerns that American media culture predisposes listeners toward bare content, missing the relational and transformational aspects of preaching.

Michael shares the concern that preaching, as a medium, might communicate content alone. "I think worldview ultimately is not simply, as I said before, information. But it also involves imitation. I think that preaching is limited in that it informs but it does not offer imitation. There's nothing to imitate there, unless you just want to be a preacher." Michael elaborated that he believes there need to be contexts that promote interaction and close range imitation:

> I used to view it as kind of seeding the environment. If you're putting good seed and you're tilling the soil, then seedlings can grow in that soil. But to think that if I've done preaching, therefore people are going to change – it's the same thing as thinking if I told my kid how to live life they're going to live it, I got to be there as they're living life and help them say, "When you did that, what were you

> thinking? Did you really think it was going to turn out like that? What do you think you could have done differently?"

> I'm walking through the incident with them to have them reflect on what they've done, to perhaps evaluate for themselves what they should have done differently in order to make corrections for the next time. There's an imitation component in there that could only take place through life-on-life. I think that's what discipleship is largely about, is being near people.

On the subject of other effective means for cultivating a christocentric worldview, every pastor interviewed noted the importance of one-on-one settings and small group environments. There was a large consensus that sensitive topics (homosexuality, relational difficulties, abuse, and politics, among others) and complex personal issues (life direction, personal struggles, specific questions) are helped through settings. Smaller group settings were viewed as promoting discussion with the leader and peers, and thus promoting cross-learning. Richard expressed well how the different settings relate. In his view, one-on-one meetings, small groups, and preaching are on "a spectrum going from listening to speaking."

Another category of the limits of preaching for communicating a christocentric worldview is the pressure to be as good a speaker as nationally known speakers on the radio. James called this the "pressure to be outstanding," which can lead to feelings of insecurity, copying others' styles, or even stealing others' sermons. Richard observed,

> If every one of the sermons is Christ-centered, you're doing all right. But when you look in the mirror you're still insecure because your ego is wrapped up. So, we're analyzing our sermons and panicking. I recognize this is just me; I'm not free from that dynamic. They're like, "That wasn't good, I wasn't witty. I wasn't powerful, I wasn't there." Well, if it was Christ-centered you're doing pretty good.

Because preachers feel the need to be outstanding speakers, they can feel insecure about their preaching. Richard's comment highlights the limitation of the pressure and the

solution the pastors appear to take – namely, that the true goal is to present Christ, not eloquence.

Second, as Richard's comment indicates, the pastors affirmed preaching as a means ordained by God to communicate christocentric worldview commitments. Interestingly, those who critiqued preaching the harshest tended to affirm God's role in preaching the most. James for example, after calling preaching a folly, asserted, "The bottom line is I think there's more going on than a learning style of a specific medium within the context of preaching. I think God has chosen to bless the preaching of his word in a way that sort of goes beyond what you would typically see in culture." Indeed, he went on to affirm a supernatural dimension to preaching that supersedes human understanding of learning styles and educational theory. Robert similarly critiqued and commended preaching as a somewhat ineffective means, which was nonetheless used and ordained by God, noting, "So, God has a foolish message, and it's communicated via foolish means, and this is one more example of God upending human social agenda and human wisdom. That is fundamental for me."

The strength of preaching is that God ordains it, and it is used by God to change people's lives, particularly when the church is gathered. William said, "So while you're all gathered, there's something going on. The Spirit is at work. This is something. This is a means of grace that he has given us." William paused to reflect and then continued, "So I believe that. I believe that the reading and the proper teaching on or expositing or unpacking God's word is a legitimately powerful thing." James passionately affirmed how God uses preaching in the lives of the gathered community during the preaching event. He related an instance when he was preaching and a mother excused herself from

the service to remove her crying baby. This same mother had been absent from church, and the subject of the church's prayers for months during a bed-ridden pregnancy and concerns about the baby's health. For James,

> That child was preaching louder than I was preaching that day about God's faithfulness, about God's provision, about how he was blessing and tending, his faithfulness to the generation way louder and way more effective than anything I could have come up with on that day; in my study, for the hours, whatever it took to come to that point.

Michael agreed that God uses the preaching event when the church is gathered. He believes that hearing a sermon through, for example as a podcast, simply lacks the power that is present when God's people gather together. "Why is the podcast of the very same event not the same as the event? That's my question." Michael went on:

> The Spirit of God, it's his sovereign choice to do what he wants to do among the people of God who are gathered. So believe that there is something to being together and believing that God wants to speak. Us being the people of God who listens collectively not only for what God wants to say to us as individuals, but what God wants to say to us as his people. The people of God are central in the overarching narrative of scripture.

Robert sums up the conviction that was characteristic of the pastors interviewed, "I absolutely believe that preaching is well suited to [communicating christocentric worldview commitments] because God by his Spirit and his word, and the medium of preaching works to change people's lives."

The pastors also mentioned how God uses preaching especially to speak to the heart. While the issue of the heart has already been addressed from the standpoint of the listener's worldview commitments, this theme picked up on the issue from the standpoint of God's action in the congregation during the preaching event. Reflecting on lessons learned when people do not appear to hear what the pastor is preaching, William related

that he's learned that people's hearts believe what they want, and that it is the Holy Spirit who changes those beliefs:

> Read Ezekiel, read Deuteronomy or St. Augustine and he'll tell you that. We're not rational creatures. Our reasons quite often search to sort of ratify what are emotions want, what our hearts want. So I think that has a lot to do with the way people hear what you say, and there's nothing I can do about that. There's something the Holy Spirit can do about that.

James talked about how God often works during the preaching event to address people's hearts, sometimes despite what the preacher actually says in his sermon. He elaborated, "For instance, you would have people come up to you later and say, 'Pastor, when you said blah-blah-blah,' and you know that you did not say that. But how it came from your lip and landed in their hearts wherein that's the conclusion; it reminds you that there is somebody else at work here. God is at work within his people."

John addressed this issue most forcefully, saying he believes that preaching and even public speaking addresses the heart in a powerful way.[401]

> When the spokesperson, that speaker or preacher, catches the heart of the person who's listening, that's another dynamic. It's not just cerebral that he's representing my hopes and dreams as a nation or as a Christian…But my point is that the preacher can't just be spitting out truth. The speaker has to capture the heart of the individual. In the church context this happens through how the speaker preacher, but also how he lives with his people.

Freedom to Speak While Preaching

One of the limitations of preaching as a means of communicating a christocentric worldview is also viewed as one of its strengths. As previously discussed, the pastors shared how preaching does not allow for a great deal of interaction or discussion with the

[401] It is important to note that John: A) appears to believe that preaching and public speaking are on a par with respect to reaching the heart, and B) uses "heart" in a related but slightly different way than it is used in this paper and by the other pastors. His usage appears to include a person's core, but also contains overtones of emotions only.

listeners. The concerns ranged from preaching as an outdated means to the ineffectiveness of preaching as a communication method, especially given the perception that current learning theory stresses the need for greater listener participation. Yet, there was a broad consensus from the pastors that one strength of preaching results from the monological presentation inherent in preaching.[402] In many ways, there was a tone that preaching provides the pastors the opportunity to say things and instruct regarding more robust christocentric worldview commitments than other means the pastors referenced.

For example, Richard cited how preaching allows him to set the agenda for a short time:

> Large groups are where I get the control of the conversation. If I'm doing it right and faithfully, I'm really letting the word of God control the conversation. But the students actually sit, and the only dialogue that takes places is internal, but I get to control what the dialogue is about all the time. So we're not chasing rabbit trails, I'm not asking them questions.

Richard also mentioned how preaching enables him to address issues in people's lives that he knows about, but may lack credibility to address one-on-one.

A number of the pastors referenced how preaching enables them to challenge assumptions they believe hinder the development of a robust christocentric worldview. For example, William shared how he likes to challenge the expectations of long time, "arm chair theologians" who arrive with a strong set of presuppositions about what is

[402] It should be noted at this point that preaching does involve some level of interaction between preacher and congregation. Examples of congregational responses to the preacher may include laughing, body language, and even verbal comments spoken in response to something the preacher said. Examples of preacher responses to the congregation may include inserting an unplanned explanation or illustration, variation in pitch, tone, or volume of his voice, or body language changes. Second, some preaching traditions are more dialogical in nature than that which is represented in the demographic interviewed for this study. Consider e.g., African-American preaching. Third, it is nonetheless appropriate to refer to preaching as "monological" as it involves the delivery of a prepared address by one person to a group of people.

supposed to be addressed in the sermon and how it should be handled. He simultaneously tries to subvert the expectations of non-Christians who

> …think they're going to hear the same old, sort of moralism, or legalism, or dry whatever. They're going to hear, and I want them to hear, we don't have it all together. We desperately need Jesus. We believe very strongly that the Bible is true, but we're not going to beat you over the head with it or use it to marginalize you or anybody else. And I want that to be unsettling.

William was clear that this is only one example, but it illustrates his desire to challenge listeners' assumptions in order to shift their worldview.

Michael labeled the ability to challenge his congregation's assumptions as "getting behind people's defenses." His method is to articulate the questions they would ask if they could. He shared:

> I think the preaching event, especially in this culture – and I'm in Los Angeles County – this culture moves so rapidly that that no one bothers to stop and reflect on their life. If they do, they really need a stiff drink to be able to bear with it, because it's tragic. So, my job in part is to give moments of pause for people to think about the questions that they probably are asking or should be asking, and then wrestle with those. The preaching event can be an opportunity to wrestle with the big, important questions, as well as the small questions.

In voicing his congregation's questions, Michael surfaces their concerns and assumptions and provides a means of evaluating them through his preaching.

The other theme that emerged regarding preaching as an opportunity to say things about a christocentric worldview can't be said elsewhere was in the area of application. Preaching provides an uninterrupted moment to apply christocentric worldview principles form scripture to the listeners' lives. Richard spoke of the way application in preaching can spur the imagination in various areas of the listeners' lives:

> But preaching lays hopefully a theological groundwork, and hopefully you're laying out there examples that begin to get their mind going in these other areas. When you're saying an application of this doctrine, an application of Jesus' work could be something like this – I always want to be offering examples that they're

> both concrete, but they can be general as to kind of spur their imagination to other areas.

In a different way, William also likes to spur the imagination through his use of applications. William believes there are two main approaches to application. The first is the use of specific suggestions, or exhortations, that apply the Bible to the congregants' lives. He said he uses this approach, but only sparingly. His main approach is to provoke self-examination through application. He remarked, "I want to do application in a way that draws people in and present such a compelling vision of the gospel that people are provoked to self-examination and reflection by it, which is a lofty goal. And the extent to which I do it is debatable sometimes." In his discussion, William used an analogy from the legal system that illustrates his view of the difference between the two approaches. He said that the French legal system attempts to anticipate every possible legal scenario and to codify it legally. "They have a legislative system that tries to legislate everything." In contrast, the American legal system is case law based. So the laws on the books are usually stated more broadly than French laws, and it is left "to the court system to figure out where the lines are drawn and the nuts and bolts." William likens the specific application approach to the French system, and his preferred approach to the American case-law approach. The examples of both Richard and William show how preaching's monologue approach actually enables the preacher to spur the congregation's imagination about the varied ways in which they might develop christocentric worldview commitments in their own lives.

Preacher Embodies the Message

The final theme that emerged about the effectiveness of preaching as a medium for communicating christocentric worldview commitments was a strong belief that the

preachers themselves somehow embodies the messages they preaches. The pastors said this is true in terms of the preacher's overall life with the congregation and also in the preaching event itself. There are two main categories for this theme: preachers represent something bigger than themselves, and preaching is an opportunity for public transparency.

First, there was a notable presence of the belief that preachers embodies their messages by representing something bigger than themselves. James said that he believes God does something unique "…in the act of preaching that is his voice to his people. I'm not suggesting that it is on the level of scripture, but the Holy Spirit uses a simple fallen human being with his word that is life-giving because his son gives life, because his son lives. He blesses that." Thus, the preacher in James' view is somehow God's voice to his people in the act of preaching.

John went further, saying that the preacher "represents something bigger." John explained what he meant by likening preaching to the delivery of a presidential speech.

> I'm thinking, for example, when President Obama gave his inauguration speech, he represented something bigger than just himself. Whether you saw that speech on TV or you were there on the capital ball, and you saw it on a big Sony screen or whatever, you felt like he was speaking to you because he was representing something that we are a part of. The authority of the constitution and the history of our nation, some of the principles, he was representing that and yet was actively speaking to us personally. That aspect is a dynamic. That's very important.

John went on to connect this same idea to preachers as those who represent something bigger than themselves in the preaching event. Indeed, preachers represent God, not just their own thoughts or even their own views. "It's a powerful tool. In the church, we would see that this prophet, or this minister, or pastor—whatever you call them—is representing God. God's love and grace, and God's lordship to us." In John's view, the

preacher not only represents God to the congregation, but also is the very means through whom the Lord speaks to his people. He notes, “The person of Jesus himself is speaking to us through this person. So it’s a powerful medium for Christians. This person is the herald who’s come from the Lord of Lords and King of Kings and says, ‘I have news for you. I have something I want to share with you.’” Thus, John believes that preachers are able to communicate christocentric worldview commitments to their congregations as representatives and indeed as the voice of Jesus to their congregations in the act of preaching, provided those preachers are faithful to scripture.

Michael became passionate in his tone on this topic. He related the experience of feeling, at times, like the Lord was doing something qualitatively different in people’s lives than that which he preached. He recalled:

> On occasion, I’ve heard people say to me, “There was this one moment when I really sensed that you were talking to me.” When I hear that I go like, “Okay, that was probably God talking to them at that moment.” But I also know there’s moments in there where I sense that there’s something that I’m saying, that I’m carrying a message that is not just simply the one I prepared. That’s a special moment. That’s a moment when you say, “Yes, this is really about us representing somebody.”

Michael paused here and became quite pensive. He went on to explain the reality of being the conduit of God’s message to his people. Michael takes this role seriously and deeply believes the preacher must meet with the Lord before proclaiming the Lord’s message to the congregation.

> It’s a very sober task. It is more than just simply getting the text right. We are representing God and we’re carrying a message on his behalf, we better deliver it well. To me that is what is huge because if you’re going to shape somebody they need a sense that you have met with the originator of the message and you’re carrying it because you care about them and you want to bring life to them, you want to be a conduit, a channel of life for them. That’s what I want; I want them to have life.

Thus, as the means of communicating as the messenger of Christ, preaching effectively communicates a christocentric worldview to the congregation.

Second, there was a notable presence of the belief that the preacher embodies his message through the opportunity for public transparency. Not only are preachers God's voices in the preaching event, but they also offer a public expression of the way they are being shaped by christocentric worldview commitments in their own lives. The pastors interviewed noted the need for the internal reality and for a public expression of that reality for preaching to effectively communicate a christocentric worldview.

In response to a question about how preaching lends itself to communicating a christocentric worldview, William began by speaking to this issue of preachers embodying their own progress. "I think it gives you a chance to be very transparent. It gives me a chance to say, 'Here's how I struggle, or here's where I fail, or here's where I need to grow, or here's something I don't understand." Similarly, James sees the pastor's need to "grow publicly" as a fundamental part of the pastoral calling and preaching ministry. For James, pastors must allow their congregations to see them as "someone in process," people who are growing in their own christocentric worldview. Indeed, he believes that preaching is exposing enough that the congregation will see through preachers' attempts to conceal their own growth. Transparency is an important part of preaching the christocentric worldview, as James explains, "You can live and operate and respond out of a sense of your own fallenness, name it, identifying it, even within the context of the pulpit. Maybe not ultimate transparency within the pulpit, that not quite what I'm suggesting, but a sense of that as you preach and bringing that to the table."

Michael agreed about the importance of the preacher's role of embodying the communication of christocentric worldview commitments in the pulpit. However, Michael explicitly emphasized the importance of the message shaping the preacher's own life more than the others.

> I tell you one thing, this is after thirty-something years doing this, I think that one of the things people can tell is whether or not it's passed through your life. Guys get out there and just pontificate on the text and quote all kinds of people. It's all accurate. It's all theologically astute. It's textually accurate and all that. I'm not suggesting you don't do your homework, so please do not hear that…I don't want to hear your homework. Do your homework. It just better be informing your own life. There better be something alive, that they sense that you know Jesus yourself, and that this is coming through your life.

Thus, the study and the preparation process ought to shape the preacher's own worldview, making it more Christ-centered. The reality of that shaping process, or the lack of it, will come through during preaching, according to Michael. "They need to see something in your own life. They need to see that the preaching is transforming your own life—that the preaching is transforming your own affections." Thus, the preaching not only verbally communicates, and not the preacher is not only of the voice of Christ, but the Lord appears to use the preacher's own life and progress in a Christ-centered worldview as a means of demonstrating that the message is true before the congregation.

According to the pastors interviewed, a significant reason preaching is an effective means for communicating christocentric worldview commitments is because the message, delivered properly, proclaims God's own message and view of the world to his people. The preacher's message is not merely the preacher's own view of the world, but is shaped by scripture and God's Spirit, even in the preaching event. The preacher's own worldview is being shaped and molded by Christ before the eyes of the congregation. For

these reasons, preaching effectively communicates christocentric worldview commitments.

Preaching Practices Promoting Christocentric Worldview

The third research question sought to examine what practices pastors find helpful for promoting Christ-centered worldview commitments through preaching. This portion of the interview was intended to help the researcher understand not the exegetical strategies the preachers employ, but how practitioners incorporate a christocentric worldview focus into their ongoing task of preaching. They key question employed in the interview was, "What are your practices that promote Christ-centered worldview commitments in your preaching?" Additional probe questions included the role of studying the cultural context of the congregation, particular language purposely repeated in preaching, and sources for nurturing the pastor's own Christ-centered worldview. This line of questioning surfaced an overarching theme that could be characterized as "showing the connections." The pastors shared how they strive to connect their preaching to the biblical story, the listener, and the preacher himself. This theme frames this section.

Connecting the Biblical Story

The pastors interviewed spoke a great deal about their concern that their messages are clearly connected to the text of the biblical story. "I like my sermons to be textual," John related. He went on to say that he believed even textual sermons are essentially topical in that each text addresses a topic. Nevertheless, his practice is to base his sermons on the text and to show it, as he explains, "I like to show that the points that I am making are from the text. So I'm going to be a little hesitant to do vast stuff that's very biblical without specific backing it up from the text." Robert echoed a similar sentiment,

taking it a step further. “One of the things first, and this is so important to me, I really want people to – and I think it’s a first principle, because if I can’t get them to do this then they’re not going to do anything else – love God’s word. Submit to it, come under it, revere it, love to read it. I want them to learn to read it…I want the text of God’s word open. I want you to see it. I want you to see it.” Robert passion for demonstrating that his sermons are rooted in the text came through his words and excited tone.

This theme also included a desire to connect their sermons to overall setting of the biblical story, especially for the sake of communicating a christocentric worldview. Michael embodied this well, stating that one significant means of helping his congregation evaluate their worldview assumptions is to put them in contrast with the worldview assumptions present in the biblical text.

> So there’s a shaping thing as well, because in order to have a worldview informed by Jesus Christ, we have to have a Jesus Christ who is seeded in the culture and history in which he appeared. So part of my work as well is to place Jesus historically and accurately in the context, to read things contextually and accurately. I think when that happens, then all of a sudden he comes alive for a lot of people as well. He’s no longer just this kind of one-dimensional kind of mythical figure who floats above the ground six inches and he looks pale, he has a white robe and long hair, and he’s European. I think part of my goal is to do a good job of that as well. I mean that’s very much worldview as well. Once you open up the Bible, you realize you’re not in your world, not this world.

William’s practice addresses this concern as well from the perspective of grounding his sermon in a proper understanding of the biblical theological background. During this portion of the interview, William got up and showed me his notebook where he takes notes on these issues early in a series, in order to understand the issues and to have a reference point as he preaches through the series. William is also careful to set his preaching text within the narrative flow of the surrounding texts. “So, I pay quite a bit of attention to, I guess, I would call it flow, narrative flow within the text itself…I’m

constantly going back to see what came before and looking ahead to see what is coming after." He then sets the sermon text in the broader biblical story of the historical progression from creation to the fall to restoration. William appeared to believe deeply in the need to preach in light of the bigger story of the Bible, saying, "I mean pay attention to story. Make sure you're presenting Christ in every sermon in the right way…I think if you pay attention to the story in the right way, a lot of other [issues] will correct themselves. So I think that's pretty important. I think just insist with all your mind on grace." For William, an emphasis on grace that arises from the text and the biblical story were central to his practice.

Robert represented that his practice is also to preach sermons that take the bigger biblical story into account to highlight the person and work of Jesus and God's grace. He shared, "That one question is always in front of me is how does this text connect to the person and work of Jesus? I believe the Bible is one story. When you look at a piece of that story, I'm saying, 'Where does this fit in the context of the overall?'" Robert desires every sermon to show the justifying or sanctifying work of the gospel. Influenced by Tim Keller, he said, "I want to exalt, explain, or apply the person and work of Jesus somehow" in every sermon.

On the topic of showing how Jesus addresses humanity's need, Richard shared that he uses two distinct tools nearly every time he preaches. The first is Bryan Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus. For every sermon,

> The first thing I want to establish is something like "here is an aspect of the suffering that sin and evil have brought into the world that we're going to address"…the most important thing in all my sermon prep, I always feel like, is establishing a Fallen Condition Focus that really speaks to an aspect of the fall. I speak about it well and word it wisely so that they can connect with it immediately.

Richard expressed the belief that it is important to help his listeners understand what's wrong in the world and in their lives so that he can show how the gospel is the answer to that problem. His desire to address an aspect of the fall each week leads into his second consistent practice, "I would say 'creation, fall, redemption' is the basic structure of every sermon I do." He explained that he rarely uses this language, but this biblical-narrative framework nevertheless informs his sermons nearly every time. "I think establishing the FCF, the Fallen Condition Focus, is always going to grab something in our hearts and in our experience—that sense that the world wasn't supposed to be like this. Then exploring the brokenness of it and then proclaiming Christ." He critiqued his use of what he views as such a predictable pattern, but still finds it helpful for highlighting human need and God's response to that need on a weekly basis as he addresses various topics.

Connecting with the Listener

Not only are these pastors concerned about connecting their congregations to the text of scripture, but most of them are equally concerned about connecting scripture with the lived life realities of their congregations. That is, as one put it, they are as concerned to "exegete their congregation as to exegete the text." A number of them mentioned a practice of having intentional casual conversations with congregation members and paying attention as they bump into people and counsel them. John referenced how he believes that some especially gifted speakers can effectively lead and preach to five thousand or ten thousand people without personally knowing their listeners. "I think for most of us who maybe aren't as gifted and skilled, we need to know our congregation. We need to know who's there. We need to know what's going on in their lives--what

they're dealing with. Some of that is from knowing people personally, some of that is just from knowing what's going on in light of the community." John strongly believes in the need for pastors to talk with the people in their congregations. Richard related that he wants to know his listeners, explaining, "I want to know what they're talking about. I want to know what they're doing. I want to know what they're fascinated by." To find these things out, Richard talks with his listeners regularly and purposefully gathers stories from them about their lives as they share. He even confided a little sheepishly, "I Facebook-stalk for the sake of sermons."

Michael described a shift that has occurred for him regarding his relationships with members of his congregation. He said he used to view preaching as "seeding the environment," and then letting those seedlings grow in that environment. He has come to the conviction that there is a greater need to be connected more deeply with the congregation. However, he cautioned that "…to think that if I've done preaching, therefore people are going to change" is akin to thinking that a parent can tell their child what to do and assume the child will behave accordingly. He talked about the need for preachers to have a feedback mechanism that allows them to know what the congregation is hearing, so that they might preach more effectively. "As a pastor, my view is that you have to be intentional in calling people, inviting people into relationship, and then spending time with those people." Thus Michael makes it a practice to reach out to members of his congregation personally.

In addition to connecting with the congregation personally, there was a general trend among the pastors of having consistent means for connecting with the culture. One way the pastors do this is by interacting with the local media outlets. John said he takes

the local paper, listens to the news on the radio several times a week, and reads news summaries online. He also mentioned asking people about their work environments to give him a sense of issues arising in the community. For example, a large manufacturer left his area taking three hundred jobs. This prompted him to ask people how this affected them. He noted, “It just opens the door to that whole problem about how secure our jobs are. It’s trying to look at societal problems, the economy and people’s engagement with it, interacting with people so that you’re bringing the gospel, as much as possible, to right where they are.” Richard, as a campus minister, reads the school paper three to five times a week to learn what issues are facing the students on campus so that he can speak to matters of great concern.

In addition to engaging local news, John and Richard, along with most of the others, engage with the culture at large. John referenced following national news and the Sandy Hook shootings of twenty schoolchildren in December 2012 as an example. He shared, “Then you hear that the principles of so many schools in [the town where he lives] called their parents together and said, ‘We just want you know what our procedure is for caring for your second grader or third grader.’ And everyone is thinking about it.” Thus, John pays attention to national news and its impact on his local community. Richard reads *The Atlantic Monthly* and David Brooks, even though his listeners don’t. He explained, “There are cultural and popular sources like that that I think give me a lot of insight and refine my understanding of the culture, of who we are as people,” as a means of understanding the cultural context in which he preaches every week.

William described himself as “fairly good at keeping my ear to the ground culturally.” His practices in this area include watching TV, listening to music, listening to

podcasts, TED talks, reading blogs and websites, social science research, and more. He noted, “That is a broad cross section of American culture.” William draws on these sources as a means of gathering illustrations, which he tracks in a Word document for future reference. William believes these things help him to address worldview-related issues in his preaching more effectively.

Connecting the Preacher

The final theme that emerged during the interviews is the need to connect the preacher himself to the Christ of the christocentric worldview. This was a somewhat unexpected finding in the research, and yet it was an area the pastors were fairly adamant. The first issue is the importance of the devotional life of the preacher. William, while not elaborating at great length, referenced his habit of reading and praying in the mornings as a part of his routine. Michael made this point more poignantly, “There’s no substitute for a man cultivating a love for Jesus himself.” He went on to make a reflective statement about his progress in his relationship with the Lord over the years, which emphasizes the need for the preacher to know Jesus himself:

> If Jesus is becoming more real to me and I’m loving Jesus – and this might sound cornball and hokey and really cliché – I’m finding that that has been missing for a lot of my life, and Jesus hasn’t been very real to me. He’s been an idea, a concept, a construct, but not a living person who’s been real to me. So, the more that Jesus becomes real to me – because I am going to meet him in person one day – the more that people will sense that he might be able to be real to them too.

Richard shared more specifically about the way he goes about his devotional time. He began by qualifying his commitment, but by the end of his description Richard had become more passionate in his tone and language:

> I’m relatively committed to regular devotional life. Though I have a structure to it, I intentionally keep it brief. So, it’s twenty minutes, and after twenty minutes, I’m done. I read one chapter, and I have a reading calendar that I follow. Yes,

> that's vital for me. I just read that chapter, it's very simple, I just pick out one thing that stood out to me and write that down. I write down a couple of things that are calls for praise, what can I praise God about, anything on his passage, what in this passage would prompt me to confess anything. From reading this passage, what kind of request should I offer to God. So I'm always praising God, confessing sin, and supplicating. That's what I do in those twenty minutes, and that's vital for a Christ-centered worldview being fresh and me being renewed by scripture.

Here it became apparent that this practice, while structured and brief, is an important part of Richard's life and preaching ministry to keep his worldview Christ-centered.

James shared of the pastor's need to grow publicly, as was discussed above. He also mentioned his belief in the importance of "a continued personal growth, a continued devotional walk with the Lord, where you're growing in your relationship with the Lord in community." He emphasized the importance of the role of community for growth. Michael also made a point that even, perhaps especially, pastors need others in their personal devotional lives for their own growth and the resulting ministry that enables among the congregation. "Be around people who are willing to talk about it, be around people where you can talk honestly about your own struggles and your own doubts, and then be around people who will challenge you." From Michael's perspective, this is an important way to work against the danger of preaching good sermons publicly, while inwardly growing cold toward the Christ of the christocentric worldview.

In addition to the devotional life, it was clear that an ongoing "study life" of the preacher is another significant means for pastors to practically connect themselves to the Christ of the christocentric worldview. For some, the focus is on deep study during the sermon preparation process. William outlined his approach to sermon preparation in which he reads three to four commentaries, including one technical commentary and "at least one that is a real practical, trustworthy, well-written preacher's commentary," and

sometimes a well-written book on the text. Robert also reads commentaries as part of his study. He shared that at the time of the interview, he was preaching through a series in Genesis and has ten commentaries he reads each week as part of his preparation. “I try and have a variety of perspectives. Often, in terms of my prep, I’ll process the ideas of others. I’ll often gather new ideas too, but it’s more like I think, ‘This is the direction I’m going to go—I think this is my sense of the text.’”

Michael serves as an example that bridges into another trend from the interviews. He also studies particularly for the text at hand, including finding resources that relate to particular aspects of his preaching series. He shared how he spent a great deal of time reading Edwin Judges on rank and status in the first century during a series he preached on 1 Corinthians, revealing, “I actually wrote him. He’s like the authority on rank and status in the first century. So I was deeply shaped by his writings, and then looked at 1 Corinthians through that lens…” Michael additionally shared that he reads a great deal on biblical theology so he can have “kind of like an encyclopedia built up inside so that if I’ve got these pieces continually circulating around, then as I’m going into the specifics, I’ve got this compass in place.” Michael’s study does not end there. He reads Jewish scholars, sociology, and more. “I enjoy reading, and I read widely. I’m curious in that area because I think it’s just always been something my parents instilled within me to enjoy that. I pretty much enjoy that and enjoy learning, in whatever mediums that comes.” In this way, Michael embodies a characteristic shared by each of the pastors interviewed.

Regarding biblical literature, the pastors mentioned reading N.T. Wright, Graeme Goldsworthy, Sidney Greidanus, John Stott, Rikk Watts, Peter Scazzaro, Eugene

Peterson, and others. In terms of other reading, their habits range from classical literature to sociology to periodicals (*The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly* came up multiple times), to blogs and more. Beyond reading, the pastors all referenced the practice of listening to other preachers, from pastors they know personally to well-known pastors like Tim Keller, John Piper, Francis Chan, and Chuck Swindoll. It was clear that these pastors share an ongoing commitment to read and learn to cultivate their own christocentric worldview.

Finally, the pastors spoke about the importance of mentors for preachers cultivating their own christocentric worldview. Robert shared that his journey in developing his own Christ-centered worldview commitments was greatly shaped by a mentor who himself stumbled onto the framework. “I really do believe in the power of a mentor. Again, the guy I was with for ten years, he was doing exactly what I’m doing now. He was trying to figure this thing out. He developed a nose for the gospel; he’s feeling his way through it. To sit and watch him do it and hear him do that week after week was invaluable for me.” Having benefitted so greatly from a mentor himself, Robert continues to advocate that pastors (especially young ones) find someone from whom they can learn.

James used the language of “apprenticeship” to describe the role of mentors in his life. James seeks out mentors with whom he can apprentice in a wide array of areas. He apprentices to learn hobbies like cabinetry, but he also believes that apprenticeship is a critical part of the Christian life and the life of the pastor. From another angle, William and Richard shared that that their current practices are largely the outworking of the mentorship they received through formal training. William made a number of offhanded

comments along the way that embodied this sentiment, “To me, to be Christ-centered is just – this is my training and my pedigree coming out here, of course – but to be Christ-centered means to be grace-centered. It’s almost synonymous.” Speaking of his approach to studying the text he added, “I’ve tried to set the text and the context in a broader story. I mean, that to me is Hermeneutics 101 but I don’t think it is for a lot of people. That’s how I was trained. One of things I’ll never forget is [one of my professors] making us repeat in class, ‘Context is king,’ like a mantra. ‘Context is king.’ And I learned from that lesson.”

Michael talked about the need to find good models and mentors and tracking them down, whether through books or personally:

> That to me is what I’m constantly trying to do…go to the headwaters and find people that are influencing you and you think are good models, and find out who influenced them. Anybody that’s good at something has been influenced by somebody. They’re not born that way. For a young preacher, I would say find somebody that’s good. But don’t just find one person because that’s a tragic mistake.

He went on to advocate that preachers be willing to find good models and copy them and don’t feel bad or apologize for imitating; that’s how people learn. He urged, “So find some models and copy, but then go beyond that. You got to become yourself. You got to find your own voice in all this.” To help find one’s own voice, Michael advocates having multiple influences so as not to get locked into one person’s style. Michael’s own practice has been to find such models. He constantly searches through bibliographies to find out who influenced his models and to track down those sources. He writes to people he admires to ask about their influences and to share their insights as a means of being mentored himself.

Challenges to Preaching a Christocentric Worldview

The final research question was intended to determine what challenges preachers encounter in preaching to cultivate Christ-centered worldview commitments in their congregations. The key question employed was "What challenges, in your experience as a preacher, do you face in preaching to cultivate Christ-centered worldview commitments in your congregation?" The pastors were further asked to consider competing worldview commitments in their congregations, how they handle those competing worldviews, and lessons learned by observing a committed congregation member's misunderstanding of a key component of a christocentric worldview. This set of questions provided the opportunity for the pastors to reflect on obstacles they face in communicating a christocentric worldview in the areas of culture, their congregations, and themselves. To capture their thoughts, this section is organized around the themes of the challenges of alternative worldview stories, the challenges of how congregations hear preaching, and the challenges that preachers face when speaking about a christocentric worldview.

Story Challenges

One theme the pastors addressed relates to the influence of alternative cultural stories that influence their congregations and oppose a christocentric worldview. Each pastor readily identified examples of alternative stories and the ways in which they address those alternative worldview stories in their preaching. While a number of terms were used to identify these alternative stories, upon evaluation, it became apparent that the pastors were describing different nuances of two prominent worldview stories that they face in their preaching – materialism and narcissism.

Materialism emerged as a common cultural story among the pastors interviewed. One version of materialism is the idea that "this is all there is." Michael said he sees a great deal of this, remarking, "Materialism means that this is all there is, that this life is all there really is. So you got to grab it all; you got to secure it all." Michael sees this working itself out in contrast to the generosity of God, who gives, "and he gives, and he gives and he gives. He gives to the point of coming personally and giving up himself." By contrast, the worldview of materialism leads people to hoard and protect and live in fear because they have difficulty trusting God and his generosity. Robert also noted the prevalence of materialism, slightly nuancing his terminology and identifying it as scientific materialism. "I think a huge challenge at this point in United States history is scientific materialism, just matter is all there is. We're cosmic accidents: time plus chance equals everything."

John identified a version of materialism that could be characterized as "this is all there is plus a deistic God." John called this a "secular worldview" that acknowledges there's a God "out there, but the world is just here and we hope he's nice to us." He identified this version of materialism as a prominent alternative story in the suburbs where he ministers. He elaborated, acknowledging that while this story has a God in it, the God is a foxhole God that a person uses like a rabbit's foot in times of need. In practice, this God is absent. He said, "We really don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We hope things get better, but there's no storyline that has Christ at the center of it." John believes there is a minority group that is actually atheistic and does not believe in God. However, he views this materialistic deism as the major worldview he combats in his ministry.

The other version of materialism that emerged says "this is all there ever was." Robert hints at this view in his statement about time and chance being everything. William developed this thought most fully, saying "Evolutionary Darwinism is not just making scientific claims; it's telling you a story. That's its power because it gives what too many people is a compelling narrative that accounts for reality." William went so far as to say that his concern is less about debating the age of the earth and the scientific claims of evolution and more about the believability of evolution as a worldview story that explains the world. He added:

> The thing that makes evolutionary Darwinism, just for a label, so potentially dangerous is that it is such a believable and plausible story. Nobody believes crazy origin stories. Nobody believes, in any meaningful sense anymore that we are offspring of the gods the way the ancients did. In a way, that's a way more false story than Darwinism, but no, it's not dangerous because no one believes it.

These examples demonstrate that materialism in different forms is one of the leading alternative worldview stories pastors encounter in trying to communicate a christocentric worldview.

The other main cultural story that emerged among the pastors interviewed was narcissism. The iterations were not uniform, but there was a thread of self and the self-as-the-center-of-significance that ran through a number of the comments. James observed the prominence of this theme related to who people are, or questions about identity. From James' vantage point "We've taken the individual to the nth degree." He believes there is an insatiable "black hole," especially among young adults, that craves attention in order to define the self. He stated, "There needs to be a definitive statement made about who you are, and that identity in Christ is the only thing that's going to be able to address that black hole, which is huge. Forever, you'll be trying to figure out how to get to people to

'notice me.'" This view is narcissistic, in James' view, in that it craves an identity apart from Christ.

Another version of the theme of narcissism was an overemphasis on "what we do." This version of narcissism focuses on finding oneself in the success of one's work. This issue led James to emphasize the need to help his congregation understand that they are more important than what they produce for God. Richard, ministering on a campus where this competing worldview is lived out to an extreme, mentioned this alternative worldview a number of times. He noted, "That's the idol of the culture, is work and success…[Work is] a good thing, but when it becomes elevated to our deity or the divinity that we worship, it's very destructive." He mentioned a student with an unfiltered version of the worldview of work narcissism. The student complains about his lack of friendships and laments that he doesn't know how to be friends. Yet, he "will not meet with anybody unless they're a potential asset in him developing a startup. He meets with those with leads to venture capitalists, professors, and other others for the sake of networking, while telling people he has no time for social engagements." This student is an extreme example, but he embodies a trend among these students and among American society that is driven by the narcissism of success.

A third version of narcissism was an overemphasis on "what we own." This is the idea of consumerism which, as Robert said, is "defining ourselves by what we buy, what we own, what we acquire." Robert believes this consumer-driven version of self-focused narcissism is also a strong alternative worldview that competes with a christocentric worldview. For Robert, this issue also shows itself in the way people idealize the area in which he lives. Because "our community is relatively idyllic," people idolize it and treat

it as another possession and define themselves by the status of living in that location. Michael sees consumerism as a problematic issue of a self-focused worldview for Americans as well, adding, "I think certainly within America, consumption is more prevalent than maybe in some other places where you do not have the opportunity to consume because you don't have the money to consume." William added that consumerism is a worldview that seeks salvation through acquisition. He said that he likes "to poke at capitalism and the, kind of, acquisition model of redemption – that salvation comes with the acquisition of things or money and the way we tend to value everything in the world turned into dollars." Thus, one alternative story that competes with the christocentric worldview story put self at the center in terms of who people are, what they do and what they own.

In addition to sharing what prominent alternative stories they encounter, the pastors shared how they handle those alternative stories. Their responses tended to be variations on a two-pronged approach. First, they expose gaps that people experience in their alternative worldviews between the way things are and the way things ought to be. Then they show how Christ fills that gap. The following examples show some ways in which the different pastors employ the approach of exposing and filling the gaps of people's alternative worldviews.

William provided an example of how his sermon the coming week was going to employ that two-pronged strategy, with a creation, fall, redemption paradigm, using different language:

> The two things are compared with glory and peace, you said, "Glory from on high and peace on earth towards men,"…So I'm kind of latching on to the ideas that God is giving us the glory that we created. We are people who were created with glory so that people lost that glory. We live our lives desperately seeking glory.

> Usually, we're trying to steal it. We're trying thieving it from God. And when we learn to give God back the glory, that's really rightfully his, then we participate in the peace, the shalom that he brings, and that's the other thing that we were created and that we lost and we seek and that with the advent of Jesus, it's not breaking in in a new way. So that's more how I'm going to can preach it.

William explained that this is an attempt to expose how people's hearts desperately cry out for peace that they attempt to find in the wrong places. Instead, they will find it by giving God glory "through the favor that God gives to you." William believes that humans were created to find peace in glorifying God. Sin and its accompanying alternative stories rob people of that peace as they seek peace through their own glory. This is the gap. But God restores that peace when people give up their glory through Christ and find contentment in God's glory. This is how God in Christ fills the gap.

Michael's version of exposing and filling the gaps is based on identifying idols and showing how only God can provide what people seek in their idols. Michael referenced being influenced by an essay from Dick Keyes, who said, "We're either finding substitutes for God's transcendence or God's immanence." When substituting God's transcendence with an idol, Michael believes people are seeking to guarantee their immorality. When substituting God's immanence with an idol, they are attempting to find meaning in a relationship they can only find in God. Thus, he attempts to determine and expose the idol and show how only God meets that need:

> I think that underneath so much of my own construct – and there's a worldview issue because that's a construct – is the issue of idolatry and how it manifests itself. I think materialism, that type of thing, that's the smoke. I think the fire is really idolatry. It goes back to the garden, it's the "no other Gods" issue and "we don't trust you back in the garden, so we got to find substitutes." Ergo, the narrative arc of the scripture is always finding substitute Gods. I don't know, that's pretty simple but it's pretty profound at the same time because it's where the heart goes.

Richard employs a framework he learned from Tim Keller and his approach to presuppositional apologetics. In short, people hold different commitments about the nature of reality, and they hold those commitments with different amounts of intensity. Some of the commitments are consistent with a christocentric worldview, and some are not. Commitment "A" is a commitment that basically everyone holds, and it is consistent with reality. For example, most people in American culture hold a commitment to quality of life. Commitments "B, C, or D" are other commitments that conflict with commitment A. For example, people might hold that self-centered, individualistic capitalism can benefit themselves and others and will not cause harm, especially to the person pursuing such capitalism. Richard would show that commitment B actually contradicts commitment A, as it causes vicious competition, the breakdown of relationships, and the erosion of quality of life. Then he would show how only Jesus ensures commitment A. As Richard put it:

> But what if instead Jesus said, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to go and swallow up sin and suffering, other people's sin and suffering and bear it on their behalf so that we can have life. Then I'm going to call my people to actually do the same thing." Now, we don't bear people's sin in an atoning way, but what if [university] students, instead of viciously competing with each other, what if they became servants to each other and didn't long for their own well-being. They just said, "I got the resurrection so I'm going to take care of you. I have the resurrection so I'm going to well with many people. I can actually let go of my need to cling to all these assets and my need to be this next Mark Zuckerberg and be servant, and not a servant leader."

Thus Richard exposes the gaps of his listeners' worldview and shows how Jesus fills the gap.

Hearing Challenges

In addition to reporting the challenges of alternative worldview stories, the pastors shared challenges about the ways the congregation hears preaching and its effects on

communicating a christocentric worldview. The challenge results from a disparity between what the preacher says and what the congregation members actually hear. The interviews revealed three predominant problematic ways that congregations hear something other than what the preacher says – hearing in fragments, hearing what the heart desires, and hearing the past.

First, the interviews revealed the problem that congregation members either hear or miss fragments of what the preacher says at times. As William put it, "just because people are hearing every week doesn't mean they're hearing it." That is, a person sitting in church each week, listening to the sermon, is likely not taking in everything the preacher says with the weight he intends. William's experience as an attorney prior to entering the pastorate provided a helpful illustration for what he meant. He shared that after each trial, attorneys perform jury surveys in order to find out what the jurors actually heard and what facts were important for making their decisions in the case. He revealed:

> And the number of times that we learned that they were basing their decision on tiny little fragments of something that caught their fancy along the way or something like that or the fact that they didn't…the things that we thought were the big crucial lynch pins often we're not. I think the same thing's in view in preaching – the things that I think are super-important in that thirty to forty minute [sermon].

This insight has prompted William to actually say, "If you don't get anything else out of today, get this…" on occasion. He was quick to say that approach does not work every week, but it can be helpful when used sparingly.

Another example of fragmented hearing comes from Richard. He told the story of driving some students to an outing with his leadership team when he had what he described as "the parental experience of sitting in the front seat and just listening to my

kids talk in the backseat and forget I was sitting there. He shared that he regularly preaches that we are made in the image of God and "that a Christ-centered worldview restores dignity to every person." He explained that this implies loving people not in and of themselves, but because of who they are as God's handiwork. Then he told how these students evidenced that they heard his preaching in a largely fragmented way despite regularly hearing it:

> Now leadership girls who are upperclassmen were just explicitly – not implicitly – talking about the people they hate. I was like, "Really?" They're like, "I hate her. I can't stand her. She's a terrible person." I hit that one again in the preaching! Again, it wasn't light-hearted or funny; they meant it. "I'm glad y'all forgot I was up here because this is educational for me."

Indeed he shared his shock at how unreflective these students were and how it challenged his assumptions about how much his students really hear.

Second, the interviews revealed the challenge that at times, congregation members hear what the heart desires rather than what the preacher says. William voiced the opinion that people are emotional rather than rational beings, and thus filter what they hear so as to hear all the things they want to hear. "Our hearts believe what they believe and want what they want and our minds ratify that the decisions we make—which, I can point you to a lot of social scientific research that backs that up, but it's also right there." That is, William experiences how people filter their hearing according to what they want as he attempts to cultivate a christocentric worldview through preaching. James also told of experiencing this phenomenon, but in a positive sense. James served in a very difficult scenario where the previous pastor caused problems that eroded trust with the congregation, the repercussions of which lasted well into James' ministry at the church. The result was that James was dragged into the situation at times and experienced blame

and mistrust due to the former pastor's mistakes. Nevertheless, he saw his congregation experience what he called "awakenings." He explained, "Sometimes awakening comes in surprising ways like, 'Pastor, when you said…' and you're just like, 'I never remember saying that at all. In fact, I can look at my notes and I'm pretty certain…we got the audio on it.'" James learned through this not to take himself too seriously.

Third, the interviews revealed a slight twist on the previous challenge in that congregation members hear the past rather than what the preacher says at times. James' story above is an example of a congregation hearing his preaching through the filter of their past hurts. This filter prevented many of them from being able to receive his christocentric worldview preaching for a time.

Michael shared his experience in the recent past when a small group of congregation members caused major division in the church he has pastored for twenty-two years. As Michael describes the situation, this group "had their doctrine, they had their beliefs, and their doctrine was supporting a worldview that that was largely a mix of nostalgia for the past, kind of an America that functions with morals and kind of as a mixture of old fundamentalism, and you can't tolerate the other." Michael explained that this group was reacting both to him and to larger cultural shifts they felt they couldn't control. At times, members of the group attacked Michael about his preaching because they thought that they already knew what he was going to say. It was clear that Michael disagreed with this group about what he actually said versus what they accused him of saying. The result of this experience for Michael was to reflect deeply about himself, his preaching, and the church's approach to ministry. "What was missing was a real strategy for discipling people to be like Jesus and live like Jesus. That was missing." He

concluded that the preaching needed to be supplemented with a strategy "for people to understand what it looks like to follow Jesus and in life to be actively sensitized to the Spirit of God and then to be living in a way they can identify that 'This is what it looks like to follow Christ.'" Thus, one challenge is that congregation members sometimes filter christocentric worldview preaching through past experience and miss what the preacher really says.

Speaking Challenges

Finally, the interviews brought to light the challenges the preachers themselves face in speaking about a christocentric worldview. The pastors referenced speaking challenges that can be categorized in three ways. The pastors expressed how easy it is at times to neglect Christ in their preaching. They shared ways in which the preacher is tempted to promote self rather than promoting Christ. The pastors also expressed the danger of preaching in a state that lacks a personal heart connection to the Jesus they are preaching about.

First, the pastors expressed how easy it is at times to neglect Christ in their preaching. Both the literature review and earlier interview findings emphasize that at the core of a christocentric worldview stands a dependence on Christ. As such an essential feature of communicating a christocentric worldview, it might appear that preaching Christ well would be the one area in which the preacher would not personally struggle. As the pastors shared, that is not the case. Robert expressed this challenge by saying that he is still learning how to preach Christ and his motivating grace in all the scriptures.

> I feel like very much I'm feeling my way through this. I'm absolutely bought in—I mean hook, line and sinker. I'm bought into this thing, but I don't have it down either…I'm like, "Okay, what do I do with this one?" I taught the book of James, and James was a really tough book. How do you preach James? It feels so

> moralistic, it so do, do, do. That was a challenge for me. I didn't want to preach James, but I did it and it was a great process for me.

Robert went to so far as to say that preaching Christ-centered worldview commitments each week from every text of scripture is the testing of a theory for him. Some weeks it is easier than others.

William articulated this challenge clearly. He faces the dual challenge of either failing to present Jesus explicitly, or presenting Jesus explicitly in the wrong way. He finds himself surprised by this ongoing struggle, despite good training, a strong personal commitment to preaching a christocentric worldview, and years of pastoral practice. He admitted:

> And that's something, after all these years I'm doing this and after being at Covenant Seminary, that sort of being steeped in the tradition that I'm in, I'm surprised. Like, why do I have to keep pushing and pushing to remember to do that? Why is that not sucked in nature by then? But I have to avoid falling into the trap of kind of doing it in the same way week after week after week after week; sort of been presenting the gospel in a lazy sort of way.

William's comment illustrates that despite a commitment to preaching sermons that promote a christocentric worldview, preachers face an ongoing battle to do it well.

Second, the pastors shared ways in which the preacher is tempted to promote self rather than promoting Christ. In a moment of raw honesty, Michael expressed his frustration about the internal and external pressure on pastors in the American church to have a church with a large attendance that brings personal acclaim.

> It finally dawned on me, that [discipleship] requires so much intentionality that it is easier, especially for the senior pastor – the goal in America is to have a giant church where you sit on the top and you are acclaimed by others and then asked to go to the conferences, your face in the back of books and all that kind of stuff. I'm being very cynical here. I'm very jaded.

In the context of sharing lessons that came out of a difficult time in the church, Michael shared this reflection as an example of the pressures that weigh on pastors and work against promoting a christocentric worldview. His response to this pressure is instructive, because he has wrestled with the temptation and come out the other side with a more humble state of mind.

> If you don't like it, and I'm not the most popular preacher in America, it's okay with me. I've already wrestled with that; I've worked through that. I'm okay with not being the top dog. I need to just be who I am. I mean, I already found that four kids are enough to handle on my life, much less eight hundred people that I'm supposedly shaping.

Having wrestled with this challenge, Michael realized that a christocentric worldview frees him from the need to give in to that pressure from the congregation or himself.

Third, the pastors also expressed the danger of preaching from a personal state that lacks an intimate heart connection to the Jesus they are preaching about. Some referred to this as piety and others as spirituality, but it was clear that they share a concern for maintaining their own relationship with the Lord. When asked if there was anything the researcher had missed during the interview, Richard asserted the critical role of the preacher's spiritual life in preaching a christocentric worldview. "My own piety in the right sense of the word is vital…when I ask [God] for spiritual vitality—spiritual vitality doesn't mean warm fuzzies—it simply comes, it says Jesus is Jesus, and his promises are true." Richard went out of his way to deny that spiritual vitality is an emotional response to God and to affirm that he can experience these times whether he is depressed or happy. Indeed, he had difficulty articulating exactly what the difference is, but he was clear that his life and preaching are qualitatively improved by a vital relationship with Jesus. For him, this state is difficult, but critical to maintain.

Michael was strong on this topic. “There’s no substitute for a man cultivating a love for Jesus for himself.” Michael confided that he has had to grow in experiencing Jesus as a real person rather than an idea or concept. From his perspective, maintaining an ongoing vital spirituality is a challenge for every pastor:

> I hear guys that give great messages, and I don’t sense that there’s something that is alive for them. That’s the danger of this preaching thing, is that you can be theologically accurate and spiritually numb inside. I won’t say dead, but I’ll say numb. I think you could be numb. That’s something that every pastor has to be constantly guarding against and finding ways to avoid, because people are looking for this sense of being alive.

Michael believes that spiritual numbness, as he calls it, erodes the pastor’s own commitment to a christocentric worldview. Further, while a pastor may be able to preach a good sermon in that state, the listeners will pick up on it. His frank comment was “There better be something alive, that they sense that you know Jesus yourself, and that that is coming through in your life. You know what? They will have their BS detectors up, especially the more urban environment you’re in and the more on either coast you find yourself.” A spiritual lack on the part of the preacher will hinder his ability to communicate a christocentric worldview in Michael’s view.

James advised any pastors interested in cultivating Christ-centered worldview commitments in their preaching about the importance of knowledge of God and knowledge of self. By knowledge of God, he means the pastor must know doctrine and the gospel in a personal way that produces repentance and obedience. “This is a message that puts two paths in front of people, a path of life and a path of death.” Pastors need to take to heart that dividing message. By knowledge of self, James said the pastor must be able to ask and answer the following question:

> Do you know yourself well enough to know what you're contributing to this mix? Because when you sow the seeds of unrighteousness, the seeds of destruction, it's held within, it's because of you. Can you live, operate and work out of that and help people understand that? That's their only hope. They yearn for one hero, and that is not you.

For James, knowledge of God and of self is the foremost safeguard against spiritual numbness. A continual process of spiritual "self-care" is a necessary practice for pastors, who must understand that they have the same needs as their congregation, and thus they require the same ongoing growth in their own christocentric worldview commitments.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching. The interview with six reformed preaching pastors examined what commitments pastors emphasize in communicating a christocentric worldview, the effectiveness of preaching as the means of communicating those commitments, what practices promote preaching that communicates the aforementioned commitments, and the challenges preachers encounter as they pursue this task. The following table serves to summarize the major findings under the headings of the research questions in order to provide an overview of the chapter.

Core Christocentric Worldview Commitments	Preaching As Medium	Challenges to Christocentric Worldview Preaching	Promoting Practices for Christocentric Worldview Preaching
Christ Dependency • God's grace in Christ motivates sanctification • God's grace in Christ empowers sanctification	Limited but Blessed • Outdated means • Easily reduced to bare content • Performance Pressure • Ordained by God for the task • Used by God for the task	Alternate worldview Stories • Materialism • Narcissism	Connecting to the Biblical Story • Base sermons on the text • Account for the context of the text • Show the text's relationship to the redemptive story centered on Christ
The One True Story • Redemptive story makes sense of the world, • Redemptive story is true and historical • Redemptive story is still happening today	Freedom to Speak • Preacher sets the agenda, • Freedom to challenge listener assumptions, • Opportunity to apply a Christocentric Worldview to life	Hearing Challenges: • Hearing in fragments • Hearing what the heart desires • Hearing the past	Connecting with the Listener • Personal dialog with the congregation • Understand your congregation's world • Understand contemporary culture
Addresses all of Life • The Gospel includes cosmic redemption, • The Gospel includes mundane aspect of real life	Preacher Embodies the Message • Preacher represents something bigger than himself • Preacher has opportunity for public transparency	Preacher Challenges • Preacher neglects to preach Christ • Preacher promotes self instead of Christ, • Preacher lacks vitality in relationship with Jesus.	Connecting the Preacher • Preacher must cultivate his own love for Jesus • Means for ongoing spiritual growth • Means for ongoing study • Learning from mentors
A Matter of the Heart • Christocentric Worldview forms core essence • Christocentric Worldview forms identity • Christocentric Worldview produces transformation			

The following chapter will consolidate the findings of the literature review and interviews and offer the researcher's concluding recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate christocentric worldview commitments among their congregations through preaching. While there is a growing body of literature that relates to Christ-centered preaching, most of it focuses on either hermeneutical considerations or on writing sermons in light of Christ-centered hermeneutical considerations. While these tools are helpful for instructing pastors in the craft of sermon preparation and preaching, there is not as much literature available that addresses how to pass on the christocentric convictions of the pastor to the congregation. The focus of this study was to explore how a pastor might accomplish this task specifically through the means of preaching. To examine this issue more closely, four research questions served as the focus for this study:

1. What christocentric worldview commitments should preaching communicate to a congregation?

2. How effective is preaching as a medium for communicating a christocentric worldview in a congregation?

3. What challenges do pastors encounter in preaching a christocentric worldview in their congregations?

4. What practices aid the preaching of a christocentric worldview in a congregation?

A literature survey was conducted in chapter two, focusing on four major areas of study: 1) literature related to biblical and theological foundations for communicating a

christocentric worldview through preaching, 2) literature pertaining to Christian worldview, to establish common features of worldview, 3) sociology of religion literature, to provide insight on the religious worldview of American culture, and 4) literature on Christ-centered preaching, to establish the extent to which authors already address concerns about communicating a christocentric worldview among congregations through preaching. In chapter three, research methodology was identified, and the researcher described the process of participant selection, data gathering, conducting interviews, and data analysis. Chapter four presented the findings from the interviews, and this chapter brings the data from the literature review together with the findings of the interviews in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

Three crises in the life of the researcher prompted the research topic of this study. First, in the course of pastoral ministry in multiple churches, the researcher spent many hours counseling people, visiting people in homes and hospitals, leading Bible studies, and, of course, preparing and delivering sermons. While there were isolated instances of change, people appeared to continue to live life in a continuous cycle of problematic lifestyles, crisis, help, and eventual return to their former ways. Fundamentally, there appeared to be a faulty motivation and a lack of power to change. Second, there was a string of change for the worse among a handful of mentors and ministry practitioners whose lives were recognized as outwardly godly. In each case, the result was a loss of ministry, fracturing of their families, and questions about the nature of their faith.

Finally, the researcher experienced a ministry trip to India in the winter of 2011 in which he witnessed the faith of the church in Northern India and their response to a

radically pluralistic and hostile cultural context quite unlike the typical experience of those living in North America. During the brief trip, the researcher observed a Christian faith that is characterized by greater commitment to the mission of the church, a significant distinction between the faith motives and power of the Indian Christians and that of their non-Christian counterparts. Furthermore, they seemed to relate more with Jesus as a living person than appears to be typical in the North American context. These experiences prompted research into a ministry approach that would produce and sustain greater change in the life of God's people in North American churches. Because the preaching of God's word is a central communication platform in the life of the church, it was appropriate to focus the research on the role preaching could, or perhaps should, play in affecting people's lives. After wrestling and reading various literature sources at the start of this study, it became clear that a significant goal of ministry is to cultivate a "christocentric worldview," especially through preaching. Pastors interested in cultivating a christocentric worldview among their congregants through their own preaching will need to know the core commitments of a christocentric worldview, how preaching functions as a medium for communicating a christocentric worldview, what challenges hinder this goal, and what practices help them to accomplish this goal.

Core Commitments of Christocentric Worldview

The literature and interviews provided a helpful framework for those wanting to cultivate a christocentric worldview among their congregation members through preaching. The starting place for a Christ-centered worldview is the recognition that the whole Bible is a unified story of how God has redeemed his creation, a story that reaches

its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. [403] Important elements of this commitment include the Reformed articulation of the story as creation, fall, redemption and consummation; the historical nature of the Christian faith focused on Jesus; and God's working through the timeline of history to bring about the redemption of all things.[404]

Second, a christocentric worldview emphasizes dependence on Christ for motivation and empowerment in the Christian life. [405] Preaching that cultivates a christocentric worldview makes plain God's generous self-revelation in Christ, who has provided for our failure and enables us to be and do what we ought. In the religious context of America today, christocentric worldview sermons must focus not merely on behavioral change, but on why and how that change occurs.

Third, a christocentric worldview addresses the human heart. [406] Worldview literature demonstrates that worldview is a near synonym for the biblical notion of heart. In this way, all worldviews share this characteristic. However, a christocentric worldview distinctively addresses the heart by motivating and empowering a person's speech, attitudes, beliefs, and actions to conform in growing measure to scriptural commands. [407] Indeed, no other worldview will accomplish this.

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[403] See, Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, 95; Clowney, 20.

[404] For Examples see Hiebert, 66; Goheen and Bartholomew, 12.

[405] Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 313, 318; Goldsworthy, 118.

[406] Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 123; Naugle, 269.

[407] Tim Keller, "The Girl Nobody Wanted," in *Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund Clowney*, Johnson, ed., 55.

Understanding worldview this way requires preachers to rethink their goals for preaching. The goal of preaching is not merely behavioral change, doctrinal information transfer, or religious experience. Indeed, preaching that seeks to cultivate a christocentric worldview will not merely aim at change in thinking, feeling, or willing. Christocentric worldview preaching aims at changing the heart, "the inner recesses of the human self" and "the pivotal nature and function of the human experience," which lies behind and undergirds all these various facets of human nature simultaneously.[408]

Finally, a christocentric worldview affects all aspects of life. This entails a commitment to God's cosmic plan of redeeming all things and a commitment to the application of this worldview in every area of the individual's life in the here and now. [409] Preaching that speaks to God's cosmic plan will help the congregation set the narrative of their lives within the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, consummation, and it will encourage them to take their place in the larger story. The Christian life is a participation in God's redemption and restoration of man's relationship with God, others, and the creation. Lest one miss the trees for the forest, christocentric worldview preaching must also promote the numerous ways in which one's faith bears on the mundane things of daily life.

Preaching as a Medium for Communicating a Christocentric Worldview

Because this study focuses on passing on the christocentric worldview convictions of the pastor to the congregation, preaching as a means of communication was researched. A prominent theme that emerged in the interviews is a view among the

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[408] Naugle, 269; Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 123.

[409] Goheen and Bartholomew, 12; Wolters, 5; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 123.

pastors that preaching is a limited, outdated, and somewhat ineffective means of communication today. Curiously, the pastors nevertheless believe in the power of preaching to communicate christocentric worldview commitments, as they believe that preached sermons are used of God. The literature defends the efficacy of preaching as a communication method ordained by God without critique or consideration of objections to preaching in light of current theories of communication or education.[410] Unfortunately, current scholarly literature on Christ-centered preaching is not keeping pace with the questions preachers face in practice regarding this central practice within their ministries.

Many of the pastors expressed concern that preaching is an antiquated communication form, that preaching is easily reduced to bare content, and that preaching pressures them to be an outstanding speaker. In a strange twist, the same pastors simultaneously affirmed the strength of preaching as a means ordained by God to communicate christocentric worldview commitments. Interestingly, those who critiqued preaching the harshest tended to affirm God's role in preaching the most, as they believe it is used by God to change people's hearts. Pastors also value preaching in that it provides freedom to speak, allowing pastors a forum to address and challenge listeners' assumptions that might hinder the development of a robust christocentric worldview. Finally, pastors view preaching as a beneficial means of communication because the preacher themselves embody the messages they preach. This embodiment occurs in the preacher's life with the congregation, as the preacher represents God's message in sermons, and through the public transparency of the preaching event.

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[410] Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 33; Goldsworthy, 35; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, 12.

Challenges Hindering Christocentric Worldview Preaching

Another goal of this study was to gain greater insight about what obstacles hinder a congregation's ability to adopt a christocentric worldview as it is presented through their pastors' sermons. Two primary concerns were to explore what external cultural factors influence congregation members and to know what challenges preachers experience inside their ministries. The primary hindrances were found to be alternative worldview stories that compete with the christocentric worldview story, listener challenges, and preacher challenges.

Four alternative worldview stories were found to compete with the christocentric worldview story: pluralism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, materialism, and narcissism. Pluralism is perhaps the most challenging to understand, as there is a distinct discrepancy between the real presence of pluralism in American religion and the level to which Americans value it.[411] According to the sociological literature, American religion takes a generally Judeo-Christian shape. Sociologists have identified that between sixty-five to eighty-one percent identify themselves with Christian faith traditions, another two to five percent associate with Judaism (the largest minority religion in America), and around seven percent associate with all other faith traditions (some of which have historic connections to Christian faith traditions). This indicates that not only are Americans religious, but Americans broadly self-identify with the Christian religious tradition.[412] Still, religious diversity is becoming a greater reality in America. Increasing immigration and globalization have increased Americans' exposure to non-traditional Western

[411] Carson, 13.

[412] For statistics on current American Religious practices see, e.g., Chaves; Froese and Bader; Putnam and Campbell; Wuthnow.

religions and Eastern religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. This means that while non-Christian religious traditions currently represent a small proportion of American society, the reality is growing.

The resolution between the reality of a predominantly homogeneous American religious base (largely Christian in at least a nominal sense) and the perception of a highly pluralistic American religion lies not in reality, but in values. That is, cherished pluralism at the popular level and philosophical pluralism among academics are greater forces than empirical pluralism or empirical homogeneity in American religion. In the end, despite the statistics, religious pluralism is a worldview story held deeply by Americans today. Preachers espousing an exclusive message will meet with opposition—especially if they do not deliver their message with care.

Another alternative worldview story in the United States that reinforces these values is called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD).[413] MTD emphasizes a sort of basic, bland morality that "everyone knows." The emphasis of the therapeutic dimension of MTD is on feeling good and being happy. The god of MTD stays at arm's length until the Moralistic Therapeutic Deist needs something, at which point he moves safely back to his usual distant place. MTD provides another way to reconcile the culture's widespread adherence to a vaguely Christian religion and the prevalence of cherished pluralism as a dominant religious force driven by worldview commitments, rather than most forms of religious self-identification.

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[413] For book long treatments of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism see, Dean; Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*; Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.

Pastors spoke almost unanimously about materialism and narcissism as alternative worldview stories that they most often encounter in their churches. Materialism emphasizes the notion that this world is all that there is in existence, and that it is all that ever has existed. There is nothing beyond material existence. Narcissism, which promotes the self-as-the-center-of-significance, ran through the interviews and expresses itself in the pursuits of a significant identity, career, and accumulation of possessions. Notably, materialism and narcissism as experienced by pastors are not "out there" in the culture, but are competing worldview stories within the lives of congregation members. Each of these alternative stories reveals a worldview that needs to be graciously and generously challenged by the preaching of a christocentric worldview.

The research also revealed challenges that negatively affect the preacher's ability to communicate a christocentric worldview. These challenges result from a disparity between what the preacher says and what the congregation members actually hear. The first challenge is that at times, congregation members either only hear, or miss, fragments of what the preacher says. While this is not surprising, it is a good reminder for preachers that listeners don't hear everything they say in a given message. Second, congregation members sometimes hear what their hearts desire to hear, rather than what the preacher says. People filter their hearing according to what they want to hear, despite what the preacher says. Third, congregation members sometimes hear the past rather than what the preacher says. Most of the pastors shared stories of conflict that arose with congregation members who had filtered what they heard through the lens of their past experiences. In some cases, the filter was the result of past hurts inflicted by previous leadership. In other

instances, congregations failed to give new leadership a fair hearing, remembering a "golden age" of days gone by in the church's life.

Finally, preachers face their own challenges in preaching a christocentric worldview. First, it can be easy to neglect Christ in preaching by falling into moralistic preaching patterns, or unintentionally relating a Bible history lesson, or even by failing to properly exhort the congregation to change. Secondly, preachers are sometimes tempted to promote self rather than promoting Christ. One pastor expressed his frustration about the internal and external pressure on pastors in America to have a church with a large attendance that brings personal acclaim. There is a danger of preaching in a personal state that lacks a vital heart connection to the Jesus about whom one is preaching. These challenges of hearing and speaking are reminders that there is a great deal of subtlety in the preaching event on both sides of the pulpit.

On the hearing end, pastors need to seek out ways to view the service and the sermon through the eyes of the congregation. Related to the speaking challenges, the current resources provide a great deal of help in teaching the proper hermeneutical approach to the text, which will yield fruitful Christ-centered preaching. Of greater interest for this study are the issues of self-promotion and spiritual numbness. In both cases, it is vital that pastors nourish their own christocentric worldview so that they are availing themselves of the same grace motivation that they preach. The research revealed helpful practices in this regard, so we now turn to practices and issues that aid christocentric worldview preaching.

Practices that Aid Christocentric Worldview Preaching

In addition to knowing the challenges, this study examined what practices help promote a christocentric worldview through preaching. These practices must address the aforementioned challenges of alternative worldview stories, fragmentary hearing, and disconnected preachers. The research uncovered three ways preachers might address these challenges through christocentric worldview preaching. First, to address alternative worldview stories (pluralism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, materialism, and narcissism) the preacher needs to help the congregation connect the preaching text and the overall redemptive-historical narrative.[414] As one pastor put it, "our lives are an answer to the questions that we're asking. We just don't articulate them because we don't stop to think about them." The worldview story people live out determines which questions they ask and thus the shape of their lives.[415]

For this reason, the preacher needs to preach the overarching redemptive-historical narrative in such a way as to make clear that the redemptive story of the Bible is the true story in which the Christian lives today. In preaching the whole scriptural narrative (at least periodically) preachers will show the interconnectedness between scripture and life. In showing the big picture of redemptive history, the christocentric worldview preacher orients the congregation in two ways. The big picture places individual texts within their proper context, thus giving them their proper significance.

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[414] Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*; Goldsworthy; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*.

[415] See for example, Walsh and Middleton; Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*; Goheen and Bartholomew.

The big picture of redemptive history also places congregants in their proper context as participants in the unfolding redemptive plan of God as recorded in the Bible.

Second, the preacher needs to make clear connections between scripture and real life as the congregation experiences it Monday through Saturday. Further insight on this is provided in the next section. Nevertheless, the pastors interviewed largely agreed that christocentric worldview preachers need to exegete the congregation and the culture as much as they do the text. In this way, preachers will be able to address congregational listening challenges (fragmentary listening, idolatrous listening, and nostalgic listening) with insight. The more preachers understand their congregations, the better they will know what their members are missing because of fragmentary hearing. Thus, they will be informed regarding what topics need repetition. By understanding the congregational culture and the larger cultural influences, preachers will be able to preach directly to, and with proper sensitivity for, nostalgic listening and idolatrous desires.

Finally, preachers must maintain their own personal connections with the Christ of a christocentric worldview if they are to address the challenges noted above. To avoid preaching that emphasizes moralism, history, or information, preachers will need to maintain the core commitments of christocentric worldview preaching, including the unified story of God's redemption of his creation; motivation and empowerment by Christ in the Christian life; transformation at the heart level; and participation in God's restoration of man's relationship with God, others and the creation. To confront preachers' tendencies toward self-promotion and spiritual numbness, the interviewees most frequently cited the importance of a personal devotional life (including an ongoing

"study life") and the need for personal, safe relationships that allow for pastors to be vulnerable about their struggles.

Having reviewed the findings of the study, the following section offers practical recommendations for preachers who desire to transfer their own christocentric worldview to their congregation through their preaching.

Recommendations for Practice

Having summarized the findings of this study, the question raised at the beginning of this chapter still remains. How can pastors, convinced of the need for Christ-centered preaching, cultivate a "christocentric worldview" among their congregations through a preaching ministry that produces and sustains change in God's people? This section now offers a series of recommendations, based on the literature review and interview findings, to aid Christ-centered preachers in passing their convictions on to the congregations they serve.

Preaching that cultivates a christocentric worldview begins with understanding the worldview issues of the author in the biblical text. A cursory understanding of the preaching text in isolation from its cultural setting and the rest of scripture does not provide the preacher adequate resources for the ways in which scripture addresses worldview issues. Sermon preparation must include studying and understanding both the immediate and broader context of the passage in question. Further, preachers need to understand the shared cultural assumptions of the author and the original audience so they might grasp how the author addresses complex life scenarios within the text. Fortunately, various authors within the scholarly literature address this need.[416] The

[416] See for example, Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon;* Goldsworthy; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*;

challenge will be for preaching pastors to maintain this priority over time as they face the multi-faceted demands of pastoral ministry.

Of course, once preachers understand worldview issues in the text, christocentric worldview preaching requires them to make the cultural translation from the worldview issues of the text to their congregation. Thus, pastors desiring to transform their hearers' worldviews will need to study today's culture intentionally to better understand and address alternative worldview stories influencing their congregations.[417] The pastors interviewed for this study shared how helpful is it for them to meet informally with members of their congregation and to talk with them about the people and issues that matter most in their daily lives. They particularly noted the importance of listening and considering their congregants' hopes, fears, and desires.

Additionally, preachers today should engage with congregation members on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and their personal blogs, as these sources provide a unique angle for pastors to understand their congregation's desires, interests, and influences. Finally, it is a truism that leaders are readers. Similarly, christocentric worldview preachers need to be readers. Reading about and studying the American cultural context informs preachers on broader, but perhaps unseen trends that shape their congregations' alternative worldview stories. By reading local and national news, sociological studies, blogs, and websites, and even watching popular television

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Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*.

[417] For more worldview stories see, Carson; Goheen and Bartholomew; Putnam and Campbell; Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*.

shows, listening to music, listening to podcasts and TED talks, preachers can learn about the cultural forces that shape their congregations all week long.

Beyond direct cultural resources, preachers benefit from an ongoing "study life" that includes reading widely outside the streams in which they are comfortable in areas such as theology, culture, novels, and more. Armed with this understanding, a pastor knows better how to promote a Christ-centered worldview in response to culturally sensitive and complex issues. Such understanding increases the relevance of the preachers' sermons for their listeners as they speak about issues with which people struggle. Such resources enable preachers to identify neglected but critical areas of life for those in their churches. Some pastors may dismiss this recommendation because of perceived time constraints or belief that this endeavor is too worldly or unbiblical. However, avoiding personal contact with the congregation or shunning cultural study through popular cultural channels may cause the preacher to fail to understand the world the congregation inhabits and the many vehicles that cultivate alternative worldview stories to the gospel. To preach a christocentric worldview with accuracy, clarity, relevance, and compassion, preachers need to study the culture of the time and place in which they minister and weave those insights into their preaching.

Third, pastors desiring to transform the hearers' worldview will need to speak to the hearts of their congregation members. The goal of preaching is not merely behavior change, inspiration, or an excellent presentation. Rather, the goal is to change the hearer's worldview commitments – a person's heart orientation[418] – so that they are informed by

[418] A person's heart orientation, embedded in a shared grand story that provides a presuppositional framework for basic beliefs about reality—such that is informed by the redemptive-historical narrative of God's restoring pursuit of His creation through his gracious provision for sin and empowerment for righteousness in Jesus Christ. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 122; Goheen and

the redemptive-historical narrative of God's restoring pursuit of his creation through his gracious provision for sin and empowerment for righteousness in Jesus Christ. Any other goal promotes moralism, narcissism, or the preacher's pride. One of the best homiletic tools to aid the preacher in addressing deep worldview issues is the use of a thoughtful and clear Fallen Condition Focus (FCF). As seen in the literature review, preachers ought to employ Chapell's FCF, and Eswine's three additional FCF strategies—a Finite Condition Focus, a Fragile Condition Focus, and a Faltering Condition Focus.[419]

Addressing worldview issues at the congregational level requires preachers to go beyond merely asking surface behavioral questions. The preacher must press deeply into the condition of humanity to identify driving heart orientations that show up in people's lives, and which the text addresses. Indeed, christocentric worldview preachers need to uncover their congregation members' desires, their motivations to persist in those desires, and the power they draw from to pursue those desires. For desires, motivation, and power are the issues that derive from worldview and out of which people live their lives. When preachers understand these deep issues in the text and within their congregations, they will be able to preach in a way that inspires and instructs their congregation in the fullness of the gospel on the complexities of real life.

Fourth, pastors desiring to transform their hearers' worldviews will need to focus not simply on worldviews-as-propositions, but on worldviews-as-stories. Worldview literature makes clear that human beings live their lives out of shared grand stories that

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Bartholomew, 12; Naugle, 267; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 122. On the near equation of "worldview" with the biblical notion of the heart, see Naugle, 267-274. See also, "kardioptical" notion, ibid., 291. See pp. 40-49 of the current study for further discussion of this definition.

[419] In Eswine's view, "Not every expression of man's broken condition is because of moral evil." For further discussion see, Eswine, 45.

provide a framework for understanding reality.[420] If the goal of preaching, as asserted above, is to change a person's worldview, it will require moving people from the false story they believe and live to adopting the redemptive biblical story in the core of their being. Further, it means congregation members must believe that the redemptive biblical narrative is a story of which they are a part, rather than thinking is was "back then, in biblical times." The previous recommendation for preachers to study their congregations and the culture is not for the purpose of keeping up with trends for their own sake. Rather, the goal is to truly understand the false worldview stories in which congregation members, and to locate the sources of those stories, which continually reform the substructure of their lives.

Alternative worldview stories that shape American lives, including the lives of church-going Christians, include pluralism, moralistic therapeutic deism, materialism, and narcissism. In order to address these alternative stories, Christ-centered worldview preachers should preach on topics and themes including, but not limited to, the following: understanding other religions, the exclusivity of Christ, the distinction between moralism and grace-motivated obedience, the fact that God is intimately involved in people's lives, the fact that God is more concerned with holiness than happiness, and God's redemptive mission to restore his creation. It would be easy for the list to go on, depending on the congregation. Christ-centered preachers will help their congregations work through the questions about life that a person asks according to these alternative worldview stories verses the Christ-centered story of the Bible. As one pastor said in the interviews, "our lives are an answer to the questions that we're asking." When congregation members ask

[420] Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 122; Goheen and Bartholomew, 12; Naugle, 267; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 122.

questions about a life that is framed by the alternative stories, their lives will answer those questions in a way that is far different than the questions asked by a person living in the story of creation, fall, redemption, consummation.

A note of caution is warranted here. While the christocentric worldview story should inform every sermon, preachers need to exercise discernment as to how often their sermons actually rehearse the whole biblical storyline. The congregation benefits from hearing the whole storyline presented periodically, so as to allow them to put the pieces of the narrative together for themselves. Hearing the whole story can aid congregations in understanding that the biblical narrative continues today, and that it includes them as much as the apostles or the prophets. Still, preachers must not fall into the trap of preaching this way every week. On the other hand, christocentric worldview preachers should similarly avoid preaching sermons that focus exclusively on the details and issues of the preaching text in isolation from the broader scriptural canon. No single sermon can accomplish everything a preacher might desire, whether painting the forest or dissecting the trees. The wise christocentric worldview preacher will judiciously adjust any given sermon in light of the overall preaching ministry, the needs of the church, and the focus of the text.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on how pastors cultivate a christocentric worldview among their congregations through preaching. As with any study, there are limitations on how extensive the focus can be. Therefore, pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable for the ongoing effort to provide the church with christocentric worldview resources.

First, a fruitful area of study would be to explore how to cultivate a christocentric worldview through other means besides preaching. There is very little literature available on the topic of cultivating a christocentric worldview. Current literature focuses on the pastor, hermeneutics, and preaching. Further research into what practices pastors use to cultivate christocentric worldview commitments in other areas of ministry is needed. Conducting interviews with pastors about how they nurture Christ-centered convictions among their leadership, through their small group ministries, in pastoral counseling, or through any number of ministries would also benefit the church.

Another area of study would be to augment this study from the congregational perspective. Conducting interviews with congregation members regarding their experience of christocentric worldview preaching would improve the ability of pastors to evaluate the effectiveness of their preaching. Further research is needed in order to allow preachers to understand congregation members and to identify their needs regarding the cultivation of a christocentric worldview. Important questions remain: What is a congregational understanding of christocentric worldview? What does their pastor do that is helpful for cultivating a christocentric worldview? What do they wish their pastor would do? What alternative worldview stories do they self-identify? What are the primary sources of alternative worldview stories? If the congregants were able to have a voice in in the christocentric worldview project, what would it be? Ministers often think about ministry as they experience it through their own eyes. More is needed from the congregational perspective.

A third topic for further study relates to the effectiveness of preaching as a communication medium. During the course of the research, it became clear that pastors

appear to hold simultaneously contradictory views of preaching as a communication medium. On one hand, they feel that it is somehow antiquated, and on the other, they believe it is God's ordained means. Pastors would benefit from further research into the sources of the contradiction, the exact nature of the contradiction, and how pastors deal with this contradiction in their ministries. A subset issue of this topic might be to explore pastoral views regarding the monological nature of preaching. Conducting interviews with practitioners on these issues would provide insight into the nature and depth of this potential threat to the preaching ministry, as well as provide insights for what pastors can do about the tension involved in engaging in a practice about which they have reservations even while they depend on its effectiveness. These areas and many more are needed in order to expand the christocentric worldview literature and resources available to pastors and the church alike.

Conclusion

At the end of this study one question remains which deserves a clear answer. How is christocentric worldview preaching, described in this study, different from the approach to Christ-centered preaching found in current literature? The answer is two-fold. First, christocentric worldview preaching differs in emphasis. While current literature emphasizes the preacher and his task, christocentric worldview preaching emphasizes the listener. The listener emphasis focuses on how preachers transfer their own christocentric worldview to their congregants through preaching. Second, christocentric worldview preaching differs in scope. Traditional Christ-centered preaching emphasizes the scriptural text and personal holiness. Christocentric worldview preaching, without neglecting those elements, emphasizes how Christ-centered preaching

reaches into and addresses every sphere of God's creation from the human heart to the grand stories people inhabit, to all the implications that follow in people's lives. By differing in scope and emphasis, christocentric worldview preaching simply makes explicit what is mostly implicit in traditional Christ-centered preaching.

This study was birthed out of a crisis in the life and ministry of the researcher. Multiple experiences of seeing ministry that failed to produce significant change prompted research into a ministry and especially a preaching approach that would produce and sustain greater change in people's lives. Now at the end of the study, it is clear that a significant goal of the preaching ministry is to cultivate "christocentric worldview commitments." By observing worldview issues in the biblical text; studying today's culture intentionally through reading, talking, and listening; employing a thoughtful and clear FCF; and addressing worldview-as-story, Christ-centered preachers will pass their convictions on to the congregation they serve.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me who you are, where you pastor and what kinds things you enjoy when you're not performing pastoral duties.

2. As a preacher, what comes to your mind when you hear the phrase "Christ-centered worldview"? What do you think might be involved in an entire worldview that is Christ-centered?

3. Think of a time when you preached a sermon you believe cultivated "Christ-centered worldview." What types of commitments were you hoping to encourage?

4. As a preacher, what Christ-centered worldview commitments do you want your preaching to communicate to your congregation?

5. Tell me your thoughts on preaching as a medium for communicating Christ-centered worldview commitments in your congregation.

6. What are your practices that promote Christ-centered worldview commitments in your preaching?

7. What challenges, in your experience as a preacher, do you face in preaching to cultivate Christ-centered worldview commitments in your congregation?

8. If you were going to offer your advice to young preachers who desire to use their preaching to cultivate a Christ-centered worldview, what would you say?

9. I'm getting help from experienced preachers like you to answer the question "How might preaching cultivate christocentric worldview commitments?" Is there anything we missed that you'd like to say?

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