

Chapell, Bryan, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, pp. 375, \$27.99

Author's Intent:

The preface of the book lays out four primary objectives for the work. First, after establishing the broadest contextual items as “authority and redemption,” Chapell zeros in on the need to redeem expository preaching. Within the framework of “redeeming the expository sermon” (p.11), the author shares his intent to reestablish the biblical call for both authoritative and effectively communicated preaching. In Chapell’s words, “the text offers practical instruction that will bind the sermon to Scripture’s truths” (p.12).

The second implied objective is akin to the first. Namely, the author intends to specifically disarm any arguments advanced in support of morally centered, society reforming preaching. Notwithstanding the generally positive message inherent to such sermons, Chapell is applying the principle “the ends do not justify the means” to all preaching that cannot defend its content via expository principles.

The last two objectives of the author are rather straight-forward. The third goal of the book is to teach the foundational components and preparatory steps inherent to expository preaching. Next, Chapell’s fourth and final intent is tied to theology. In short, he presents a biblically sound defense, and subsequent call for a commitment to expository preaching.

The Book's Content:

Chapell did his readers a great service by communicating the content of his work in an extremely thorough and revealing way. At the onset of every chapter the author begins by outlining the material and its flow therein. Consequently, every component of Chapell’s argument is laid bare for the reader to contemplate and find within the context of the chapter. Moreover, beneath every structural outline, the author goes so far as to offer his objective for that particular chapter.

What follows, in an attempt to summarize the content of the book, is a parade of purpose. Each chapter’s objective, as offered by the author, is highlighted to reflect the crux of the work. Chapter one is committed to communicating how important preaching is and what is really important in preaching. Next, chapter two identifies the commitments a preacher assumes in developing a well constructed sermon. Chapter three explains the basic tools and rules for selecting and interpreting texts from Scripture. Then, chapter four follows to identify the historical, homiletical, and attitudinal components of expository messages. At the onset of chapter five, Chapell shifts gears and begins to focus on the “how-to” element of preaching. The chapter is centered around how to prepare and present the explanation component of a sermon. Chapter six presents the rationale for, the features of, and an instructional system for good outlining of sermons. Moving on, chapter seven explains the why and how of illustrating

expository sermons. Next, chapter eight demonstrates how to apply the truths of expository sermons with the relevance, realism, and authority. Chapter nine ties in by presenting principles for constructing effective introductions, conclusions, and transitions. **(disagree w/ figure 9.2)** The third major division of the book begins with chapter ten. Herein the theological grounding of expository preaching is introduced and defended. The emphasis of the tenth chapter presents the overarching theological concern for constructing sermons as indicated in previous chapters. Chapter eleven continues by explaining how to construct expository sermons that reflect the redemptive content of every biblical text. The final segment of the book is listed as an appendix. However, the hands-on, application-centered elements contained in the appendix are invaluable to inexperienced preachers. The topical sermon insights, specific service type (i.e. marriages, and funerals) recommendations, and personal aspects of presentation are far more than an afterthought. The appendix serves as the crescendo of Chapell's concert of preaching contributions.

Affirmative Contributions:

- The first figure/diagram (1.1 on page 26) moved me by its insight. In visually representing the “path of the gospel” and Holy Spirit in contrast to the “path of the listener,” showing the sequential relationship of ethos, pathos, and logos, I was given a tool by which I will relate this truth to unbelievers in the future.
- After explaining the need for and value of unity in a sermon, Chapell offered the following quote which helped crystallize the litmus test of application for me: “You will know you have unity when you can demonstrate that the elements of the passage support the idea that you will make into the theme of your message and you can state that idea in a form simple enough to pass the 3a.m. test” (p.39).
- Chapell introduced the idea of “the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)” to me in this volume. While he has not created a new principle, in addressing the purpose of our sermons, the author has put a very good, working handle on this key component. In Chapell's words, “determining a sermon's subject remains only half-done when the preacher has discerned what the biblical writer was saying. We do not fully understand the subject until we have also determined its reason or cause... Until we have determined a passage's purpose, we should not think we are ready to preach its truths” (p.40).
- In describing the application component of preaching, Chapell poignantly calls it “the so what?! of preaching” (p.44).
- “Information without application yields frustration” (p.48).

- In trying to determine how to discern the meaning of Scripture, Chapell explains the concept often contributed to the early reformers – the analogy of faith. In short, we are reminded that we should use “Scripture alone as the basis for their (our) exhortations” (p.71).
- “...the exposition of the Word involves three elements: presentation of the Word (it is read), explanation of the Word (making it clear and giving its meaning), and exhortation based on the Word...” (p.80)
- Figure 4.4 does a great job of showing how the preacher should appropriate the balance of a sermon’s content based on the text, the audience, and the purpose of the preaching.
- “...explanations prepare the mind, illustrations prepare the heart, and applications prepare the will to obey God” (p.87).
- “While original-language study will add richness to our exposition, the Bible does not hide its truths in language mazes” (p.106).
- “As a rule of thumb, expositors owe no more to explanation than what is necessary to make their points clear, but owe no less than what is necessary to prove their points” (p.115).
- “the technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of the listeners” (p.129).
- “A proposition is the wedding of a universal truth based on the text with an application based on the universal truth” (p.140).
- In outlining a text, Chapell offered the following insights that will help me to remember a simple way to cover the essentials: “The bottom line for structure simply requires that all expository sermons have F-O-R-M. “Every outline should be, Faithful to the text, Obvious from the text, Related to the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF), and Moving toward a climax” (p.157).
- “Like the first sentence of a sermon, the last should also make a significant impression” (p.247).
- “Never do anything always” (p.256).
- “Theocentric preaching inevitably becomes Christocentric not because the sermon always cites the name of Jesus or draws to mind some event from

his earthly ministry, but because it demonstrates the reality of the human predicament that requires divine solution” (p.296).

- The appendix sections 6 & 7 (Wedding Messages & Funeral Messages) are golden nuggets of truth and instruction for me. Having never served in vocational ministry, I would not have known how to handle such circumstances without the insights of Chapell. Consequently, this section is probably the most valuable part of the work for me.

Points of Disagreement:

- I disagree with Chapell’s stand on the relationship between genuine exposition and the sequential ordering of the text/sermon. The author says: “An expository sermon obligates the preacher to present the truths of a text, but not necessarily the pattern of the passage” (p.112). Then, on the following page, he says: “The advantage of following the pattern of the text are obvious; the pattern of the text tends to reflect the pattern of the biblical writer’s thoughts...” (p.113). I have two observations: first, the author is wrong to say that “following the pattern of the text TENDS to reflect the pattern of the biblical writers’ thoughts...” By definition, what the biblical author wrote, and how he wrote it, IS the biblical author’s thoughts. The difference between these two words is huge. In my opinion, to give license to the “TENDS” interpretation is to open the door to liberal theology. It is a matter of principle. Moreover, I do not believe a conservative, high view of Scripture can advocate the interpretive “TENDS” of Chapell’s position, and then later tell the pluralistic, liberal theologians of the day that they need to have a higher view of Scripture. You cannot break a principle in one area and then defend it in another. Principles are defended with integrity through the power of their inherent truth. To conditionalize a principle is to strip it of its timelessness. In essence, allowing the preacher to reorganize the text, is giving license to someone who says, when looking at Bible, “I have a better idea... I can say this in a way that will reach my audience more effectively.”
- I disagree with Chapell’s recommendation to ignore referencing an illustration’s source (p.184), saying: “do not burden the listener with unnecessary documentation.” In my opinion, including references only adds to the preacher’s credibility.
- I do not like the idea of beginning each sermon with the reading of the text, as espoused in figure 9.2 (p.241). My reason is grounded in an evangelical orientation. I want my preaching to grab the audience and minimize the risk of the unchurched to tune me out from the onset. A timely, relevant illustration is more apt to grab a lost person, after which time we can pull them into the text...

Assessment of the Value of the Book:

Chapell tackled a worthy cause in this volume. His recognition of the Church's need for effective, expository preaching is well founded. Moreover, he acknowledges that a Church that is not truly learning and therefore reflecting the biblical truths of Scripture cannot be sharing a biblically centered ministry with the world. In as much as the author set out to establish the need for, solution of, and theological integrity within expository preaching, the book accomplished its goals.

I believe the work offers a valuable contribution to the discussion of preaching. On a continuum of sermons, with polarized ends being represented by "orthodoxy only" and "marketing of ministry," Chapell's book does a good job of describing the need for a centralist's position on the scale. In terms of defending the need for a balance between textual truth and effective communication, the academic text books of this course offered a range of perspectives. In my opinion, while all advocated the center line of the continuum noted above, each one emphasized a different level of application. Stott, for example, shared a perspective from the highest elevation. In essence, his work looked at the issue from 10,000 feet and offered a wide lens analysis. York's book, on the other hand, came down to a roof-top level and concentrated more on the X's and O's of tactical application. Chapell's work landed between Stott and York in elevation. He offers more context than York and more specific instruction than Stott. Each is valuable in that they help to weave a comprehensive fabric of understanding. Chapell's volume is a very good overview and introduction to the broadest level of information on the subject.

The strengths of book are its scope and organization. It hits all the high points and presents them in a very effective manner. To Chapell's credit, I could find no weakness worthy of note. This book will be an often referenced and highly recommended pillar in my personal library.

- Jeffrey Pearson