

*Study Guide to Be Used with*  
*Christ-Centered Preaching by Bryan Chapell*

**Caveat lector!** While most of what you read in *Christ-Centered Preaching* will leave you shaking your head in agreement, there will also be times the discerning reader will recognize elements of Calvinistic theology. Remember the Calvinistic theological distinctives. God's sovereignty is typically exalted over almost every other divine attribute. A commonly used summary of classical Calvinistic theology uses the acronym TULIP: T – total depravity; U – unconditional election; L – limited atonement; I – irresistible grace; and P – perseverance of the saints.

*Prefaces and Chapter 1: Word and Witness*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in the prefaces and chapter 1 where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

In the second full paragraph on page 15 you will find a summary of what Chapell means by “Christ-centered” preaching. Evaluate his definition from the perspective of confessional Lutheran preaching.

On the top of page 16 the author writes, “There is not one right style of preaching any more than there is one right style of Scripture.” Evaluate the practical implications of his point for our preaching.

In the last sentence of the first full paragraph on page 25 the writer states: “The goal of preaching is not merely to impart information but to provide the means of transformation ordained by a sovereign God.” While we might word this slightly differently, how well do our sermons reflect that we know this truth?

In the first full paragraph on page 31, Chapell gives his definition of expository preaching. Would you agree with his definition, and, do you think he would agree that our preaching is expository?

On page 35, consider the usefulness of the writer's point on the importance of ethos and pathos when what we want to get across most of all is logos (consider also the usefulness of his diagram). As you perceive it, is there a weakness in our midst in grasping the importance of any of these three in preaching?

## *Chapter 2: Obligations of the Sermon*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

On the top of page 48, the author addresses not loading everything into our sermon that we discovered in our text study. What makes this such an easy trap to fall into? What encouragement does he give us that can help us avoid this trap?

On pages 48-49, Chapell urges preachers to determine not only the "what" of the text but also the "why." Evaluate Chapell's example of the two reasons why a text may bring up the concept of justification.

Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus (FCF, 48-52) is roughly equivalent to what we typically call the malady or specific law of a text. Yet note – and evaluate – any differences between our malady and his FCF. What happens, for instance, if you "push" just a bit further some of the examples he lists in which he believes an FCF might not be sin, but it may be "just needs that our fallen condition imposes" (51).

What problem may arise because he does not seem to emphasize the careful crafting of a corresponding cure or telic note?

What do you think about what Dr. Chapell's homiletics instructor told his students that they should think about as they would imagine him sitting in the back of their churches (the "so what" question on page 53)?

### *Chapter 3: The Priority of the Text*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

On page 60 the writer discusses the concept of an expository unit. Consider the advantages/disadvantages pericopic preachers have in regard to that concept.

On page 64, Chapell addressed planning sermons far in advance. In a recent survey done among WELS pastors, planning for preaching more than a few weeks in advance was practiced by only a small minority. What might be the advantages for our preaching of planning our preaching texts several months in advance?

On page 65, Chapell gives his reasons for following *lectio continua* rather than *lectio selecta*. Note any "holes" in his rationale. Is there a place for *lectio continua* in Lutheran preaching?

On page 74, the author speaks of the blessings and curses of commentaries. Are there any points on either side that you think he misses?

Chapell talks about the importance of understanding the *literary* context of a text (78-79) and the damage that can be done when we ignore this (note his example from Proverbs). Do you believe this typically receives sufficient attention in our preaching?

On pages 79-80, the writer points out that Evangelical preaching is haunted by a failure to ask this question: "How does this text disclose the meaning or need for redemption?" How well do you believe this question is being asked in our midst?

## *Chapter 4: Components of Exposition*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

On pages 94-99, the author discusses various aspects of the difference between preaching with authority and being authoritarian. Evaluate his points. How do we do in the WELS in understanding his distinctions?

Evaluate this statement: speaking with an authoritarian manner or tone may actually disguise a *lack* of trust in the Word's inherent authority and power.

## *Chapter 5: The Process of Explanation*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your own preaching and for helping your students. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

What specifically do we need to do in preaching in order to “guide [our hearers] in such a way that [they] discover that the labyrinth is a myth” (103)?

Below is a series of questions Chapell suggests that the preacher uses to prepare to preach on any text. Is there anything missing from his list that you would add? Evaluate why he suggests asking the last three questions in the midst of the work of explanation when those questions are more fitting for appropriation/application.

- What does the text mean?
- How do I know what the text means?
- What concerns caused the text to be written?

- What do we share in common with those to (or about) whom the text was written and/or the one by whom the text was written?
- How should people now respond to the truths of the text?
- What is the most effective way I can communicate the meaning of the text?

Here are the four steps that Chapell believes the preacher follows in order to be able to answer the six questions listed above. Are there steps he is missing? Is there something he lists that you wouldn't list?

- Observe
- Interrogate
  - Exegete the passage
  - Outline the passage
  - Background the text
- Relate
- Organize
  - Sequence and order
  - Exhaust and cover
  - Highlight and Subordinate

Evaluate the author's reasons (116-118) for preferring to follow an analytic path through the text. Is the analytical path the default mode you use as you develop the outline of your sermon? Why or why not?

Analyze the considerations Chapell lists on page 118 for when the preacher would depart from an analytic presentation of the text.

Do you think the writer's principle of "exhaust and cover" violates the unity of the sermon? Why or why not?

What do you think of Chapell's "steps" (120f) for how explanation is "delivered" in the sermon?

- State the Truth
- Place the Truth
- Prove the Truth
  - Restatement
  - Narration
  - Description and Definition
    - Exegesis
    - Argument

Evaluate Chapell's belief that restatement is "one of the most powerful oral communication tools" (122).

Where do you agree and where do you disagree with the author's warnings about the use of imagination in narration (122-123)?

Evaluate his encouragements and warnings about the use of exegetical insights in our preaching (124-125).

## *Chapter 6: Outlining and Structure*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

On page 129, Chapell discusses the difference between an exegetical outline and a homiletical outline. How does this distinction help explain why two pastors preaching faithfully on the same text can have such different sermons?

Summarize the distinctions the author makes on pages 129-131 between a topical, a textual, and an expository sermon. What do you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of sermon?

Compare footnote #20 on the bottom of pages 135-136 with footnote #25 on the bottom of pages 138-139. Is preaching chiefly about information or transformation? How might noting the distinction between being a teacher (διδάσκαλος) and being a herald (κῆρυξ) help us here?

Here is a quotation from William Hendriksen's commentary on St. Matthew: "Between preaching and teaching there is a difference, though it is true that good preaching is also teaching. The emphasis, nevertheless, is not the same. The word used in the original for *preaching* means *heralding, announcing, proclaiming*.... *Teaching*, on the other hand, indicates imparting more detailed information regarding the announcement that was made" (249).

What encouragement does the author give to us on pages 138-139 when we become discouraged by how little our members may remember about the specifics of a sermon a day or a week (or even an hour!) after it is preached? How does the distinction between preaching and teaching come into play here also?

The debate about using first or second person in the preaching of the law has often been warmly debated in our midst. How does footnote 40 on page 146 offer a middle ground?

On page 158, the writer makes the point that the organizational details of our sermons are not an end in themselves (as if the goal is to make sure our hearers can repeat back to us all our subpoints). Logically organized points and subpoints are a means to an end so that the hearers are confronted and comforted and empowered by the Spirit's message. As you consider that point, comment on the advisability of displaying detailed outlines with PowerPoint or providing note taking inserts in the bulletin. (Once again, consider the distinction between preaching and teaching.)

On page 166, how does Chapell use the "front door" and "side door" or "back door" analogy to help us picture the difference between deductive and more inductive/narrative sermon styles?

## Chapter 7: The Pattern of Illustration

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

On page 178 Chapell confesses that he once approached including illustrations in his preaching only from the pragmatic purpose of maintaining interest. What far more important purpose for illustrations does he defend?

How does the wise use of illustrations relate to the statement that “doctrine isn’t for doctrine’s sake” (184)?

On page 186 Chapell states that “*the primary purpose of illustrations is not to clarify but to motivate.*” Evaluate that statement in light of the amount of concrete illustrations Scripture gives us in the narrative sections of Old and New Testament.

On page 191 the author speaks of cultivating “the ability to isolate and associate experiences” from everyday life. What barriers get in our way when it comes to being careful observers of life around us?

Evaluate the importance of the warning, caution, or encouragement the author gives with each of these “pastoral pointers” for illustrations on pages 203-204.

- Get the facts straight
- Beware of untrue or incredible illustrations
- Maintain balance
- Be real
- Do not carelessly expose, disclose, or embarrass
- Poke fun at no one but self
- Share the spotlight



- Demonstrate taste and respect sensibilities
- Finish what you begin

## *Chapter 8: The Practice of Application*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

On page 211 Chapell states that “Application...focuses exposition.” How might that give us assistance in spotting when we are on a tangent in our exposition (at least for the purpose of that particular sermon)?

What does the author mean by “instructional specificity” on pages 214-216? How important is that concept in our preaching?

What does Chapell mean by “situational specificity” on pages 216-219? How important is that concept to our preaching?

On page 216 Chapell identifies two common errors when it comes to “situational specificity”: simple generalization and instructional multiplication. Which is the greater problem in our preaching?

Why is “going in through the ‘who’ door” (217) such helpful advice as we are working on the application of our sermons?

Take a careful look at page 219. When we are encouraging sanctification, the challenge to avoid any hint of motivation for guilt and greed is significant. Evaluate Chapell’s answer to that challenge.

What subtle path to work-righteousness or self-help gospel is the author identifying in his section on the “how” of application (pages 220-222)? How real a danger is that in our preaching?

As we seek to empower our hearers with God's grace for sanctified living, what is the important difference between merely talking "about" enablement and actually supplying such enabling power?

Look at the diagram on page 223. What does the author mean by "raining" key concepts and terms as a key point is developed? How useful a concept do you believe that is?

On pages 224-227 the author describes a process he calls "unrolling" of a concrete situation. What does he mean by that process? While "briefly shining the focused beam into other identifiable situational possibilities" (figure 8.5) could be helpful, when might we also end up insulting our hearers' intelligence?

On page 227, Chapell begins to speak about what he calls the "breaking point" and how to deal with it. How real is the challenge of the "breaking point"?

Briefly summarize and evaluate what the author means by each of the following tips to overcome the breaking point.

- Forewarned is forearmed
- Conclusive arguments
- Disarming illustrations
- Commonsense approaches
- Task sensitivity
- Mature guidance
- Mandate clarity
- Respect for complexity
- Spiritual integrity

Pay special attention to the closing paragraph on page 235 about "pastoral patience." Why is such a spirit important in preaching? What helps us maintain such patience?

## *Chapter 9: Introductions, Conclusions, Transitions*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

What foolish assumption about our listeners does Chapell help us confront on page 238? What happens in our preaching when we make that assumption?

Look at the quotation from William Hogan on page 238. Evaluate what he believes is the key challenge to be accomplished by the introduction to the sermon.

As we begin our sermons, we have spent hours studying and pondering that sermon text while our people may not have thought about that text at all. What challenge for preaching does that place in front of us? What in the process of preparing a sermon can keep you from forgetting where you “started” in the process?

On page 240 what warning does the writer give about starting with a catchy introduction that is not really at the heart of the sermon’s point?

Consider what Chapell says about identifying the Fallen Condition Focus (what we would call the malady) in the introduction on page 241. Why is that important? What caution needs to be sounded at the same time since this is only the introduction?

On page 242, in Figure 9.1, the author shares with us his five step “Introduction Chain.” Evaluate the important of each of the five steps he lists:

- Arouse Interest
- Introduce the Subject
- Make It Personal
- Bond to Scripture
- Attach the Proposition

Chapel states that “*there should be no new exposition or application in a conclusion*” (255). Why is it so critical not to introduce new exposition or application in a conclusion?

What important encouragement for conclusions is missing in this entire section (hint: it is surprisingly absent when you consider the title of the book)? You will notice what’s missing particularly as he mentions that the conclusion seeks to “mobilize the wills of the listeners to conform to previously specified imperatives”?

The author warns that if we don’t pay attention to the transitions of our sermons, “the sermon will feel like patchwork and the prominence of the seams will obscure the overall design” (261). What would you list as the major and minor transitions that we must craft carefully so that our sermon does not have the feel of disjointed “patchwork”?

Analyze the usefulness of each the following types of transitions the author lists:

- Knitting Statements
- Dialogical Questions
- Numbering and Listing
- Picture Painting
- Billboards and Branches

## ***Chapter 10: A Redemptive Approach to Preaching***

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

Earlier we had mentioned that Chapell’s approach does not craft a clear telic note that focuses on the gospel (the reverse of the Fallen Condition Focus). On the top of page 273, he mentions why he emphasizes the Fallen Condition Focus. Does his statement here overcome that problem we noted?

Notice the concern the author raises on pages 273-274 about (devotions and) sermons that speak of biblical themes, but actually end up as sub-Christian messages. How much of a challenge is this for our preaching?

On pages 275-276, the author deals with one of the greatest challenges to Christocentric preaching: preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Is there anything in his line of argument with which you disagree? Is there anything missing that you would add?

What is the wisdom of Chapell's comments about using both a "magnifying glass" and a "fish-eye lens" (275) when studying a text?

On page 279 the author gives us his lengthiest definition of what he means by Christocentric preaching. How do his words help us avoid artificial or clumsy Christ-centered preaching?

Comment on the usefulness of the four specific "redemptive foci" that the author believes help to reveal any text's relationship to Christ. Do you believe any of these are taking "inappropriate liberties with a text?"

"The text may be:

- predictive of the work of Christ
- preparatory for the work of Christ
- reflective of the work of Christ and/or
- resultant of the work of Christ" (282).

With more Old Testament narratives being suggested for preaching by the supplemental lectionary readings found in *Christian Worship Supplement*, what's the importance of the encouragement the author gives in the last two paragraphs of page 285 to make sure we do not overlook the imperfections found in every hero and heroine of faith?

On pages 289-293 Chapell reveals one of the main reasons he wrote his book: the drift toward what he calls "The Deadly B's" in much of Evangelical preaching. What might lead even a Lutheran preacher to get caught up in "deadly B" preaching?

Take a look at the final paragraph of the chapter on page 295. Why is Chapell's "bottom-line" question so critical to faithful preaching?

## *Chapter 11: Developing Redemptive Sermons*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

With allegory making somewhat of a comeback among some confessional Lutherans, note Chapell's strong words about allegory (and its "relatives") on pages 300-301. What makes allegory alluring to the Lutheran preacher? What makes allegory dangerous in the Lutheran pulpit?

What makes the writer's way of urging us to preach Christ different from allegorical flights of fancy?

In figure 11.1 on the bottom of page 301, and especially on the top of page 303, Chapell addresses what he calls "leapfrogging to Christ." Is such "leapfrogging to Christ" a problem in our preaching?

Notice the clear statement about the vicarious nature of Christ's perfect obedience in the first full paragraph on page 306. When Dr. Chapell was asked in a class whether he meant the same thing that Lutherans mean by the "active obedience of Christ" he answered in the affirmative. When Dr. Chapell was further asked why this teaching is found so infrequently in Evangelical writings, his opinion was that many are afraid what it will do to sanctification to proclaim that the whole law has already been fulfilled for us! All of that leads to this question: do our listeners hear enough from us about the active obedience of Christ?

Consider the point the author is making in the first two paragraphs on page 314. He urges us to make it clear in our preaching what is the primary motivation for sanctified living. Notice also his argument on the bottom of page 315 for why preachers feel a need to lean on other paths to spur on sanctification. While the author is not speaking against preaching of the law as mirror and curb, how are we doing in keeping the power of the gospel as the primary motivation as we encourage sanctified living?

Consider the first two full paragraphs on page 321. What further strong reasons for being Christocentric in our preaching do these words give us?

On page 325, the author speaks about the confidence we have because sin's power has also been broken in our lives. (Please note: how the author expresses the point at times unfortunately seems to point us to our faith rather than to the source of faith.) How regularly does this message of the freedom from sin's power find its way into our preaching? What happens when we fail to proclaim that truth?

On the top of page 326, Chapell makes some critical observations about the relationship of the indicatives and imperatives of Scripture. "What does this mean" for the sanctification encouragements in your sermons?

On page 327, the author offers us another "bottom line" question. Evaluate the usefulness of this bottom line question for evaluating our sermons (especially sermons that are doing a significant amount of encouraging sanctification).

## *Appendix 1: A Philosophy of Delivery and Dress*

### *Appendix 2: A Philosophy of Style*

List here anything you read (be sure to note page and paragraph) in this section where you believe Calvinistic theology may be showing itself.

Also, list here one statement from this section that you will most want to remember for your preaching ministry. (Be sure to note page and paragraph.)

Look at Chapell's comments in the first paragraph of this appendix (329). What (at least) double encouragement can we find for how we present ourselves in the pulpit?

On pages 329-330 Chapell speaks of two specific hurdles to natural expression: mimicking the delivery of "pulpit idols" and intimidation. What did he offer as an answer to those hurdles? What would you add?

List any practical suggestions you have found helpful for achieving "kitchen table naturalness" in the pulpit.

"When our manner conforms to our sermon's content, it becomes obvious that our message has had an impact on us. Thus, delivery acts as a window to our sincerity,

which ultimately carries the power of our words” (332). In what way can we agree with this statement? Where would we see an overstatement?

Before we are too hard on the author for his exuberance on this issue, remember these words from Walther in *Law and Gospel*: “A preacher who has personally passed through this experience [made thirsty by Moses and refreshed by Christ] can really speak *from* the heart, and what he says will go *into* the hearts of his hearers” (23). And again: “When a preacher proclaims what he has ever so often experienced in his own heart, he easily finds the right words to speak convincingly to his hearers, according to the good old saying: *Pectus disertum facit*, that is, it is the *heart* that makes eloquent” (112).

On page 333 Chapell identifies three basic types of monotone that can hinder congregations hearing the message: “low and slow; high and fast; and rhythmic.” Each of us will tend to lean toward one of these. How might we go about identifying where one of these might be getting in the way of our message?

On the bottom of page 333, what is the author’s rather simple suggestion for overcoming any kind of monotone? What would you suggest as the best way to move from a predictable pattern to saying things “as though you mean them”?

On page 335 what unfortunate message does the author suggest we may be conveying if we speak without expression (in particular – if we preach without ever smiling)? (Give his experiment a try!)

Evaluate the author’s insight (page 336) that natural gestures tend rise up to sternum height and are away from the body. (Part of your evaluation might be just taking special note of others speaking to one another in casual conversation.)

Here is what Chapell lists as his one unbreakable rule of great delivery: “*Showing genuine enthusiasm for what you deeply believe is the only unbreakable rule of great delivery*” (338). How do we get this genuine enthusiasm? What practical encouragement does that give us in our sermon work?

In the third full paragraph on page 341, what philosophical fork does the author believe confronts every preacher? How real a challenge do you believe this is for us?

On the top of page 342, Chapell addresses the critical issue of authenticity. Summarize his point, and, determine how important you believe this is to preaching.