Reading Scripture through the Christ Lens

June 2, 2018

What is your goal when you study or teach the Bible? Bible study involves much more than training people to win a Bible trivia contest or expanding your biblical knowledge. Good teachers want to see change in the lives of their students and in their own lives as well. Can any kind of Bible study be life-changing? Think about the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They studied the Scriptures diligently and meticulously, but Jesus said that they missed the point completely (cf. Jn 5:39-40). The question is not about whether we study and teach the Bible, but about how we study and teach the Bible. So, how do you read the Bible? It’s not about whether you can win the national Bible Bee or not. The Bible study alone doesn’t transform our lives. It’s only Jesus who can change our lives. We must constantly remember that all the Scriptures testify about Jesus Christ. The goal of our Bible study is to meet Jesus and to lead people to Him.¹

In this presentation, I’m going to talk about the Christ-centered reading and teaching of Scripture. We must make sure that our Bible studies are centered around Christ and his gospel. Our calling is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All the Scriptures Testify about Christ

The New Testament teaches a Christocentric reading. Christocentric reading was a major feature of the Reformation that taught the principle of sola scriptura (by Scripture alone). A Christ-focus is fundamental and indispensable to Bible study. Reading Scripture through the “Jesus lens” is reading it the way it was originally intended.² The New Testament teaches that we must read the Old and New Testament in light of Christ.

Jesus’ Teaching:

The New Testament authors interpret the Old Testament from the reality of Christ. Where did they learn this? It was from Christ himself.

On Easter morning, Jesus met two sorrowful, hopeless disciples on the Road to Emmaus and opened up the Scriptures, showing that it spoke of him: “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:25-27). The risen Jesus taught the New Testament believers to read all Scriptures in light of Christ, the crucified and risen Lord.

The risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room. He ate broiled fish in their presence, showing the reality of his resurrection. He said in Lk 24:44-45: “... everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” The risen Jesus taught that all Scripture is about Christ, specifically his sufferings and glory.

Mt 5 teaches that Jesus is the climax and fulfillment of the Old Testament (5:17). John teaches that all Scripture is about Jesus Christ. See Jn 5:39, 46 and Jn 8:56. In John 5:39, Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” The Scriptures bear witness about Jesus Christ. John 5:46 teaches that Jesus Christ fulfilled what Moses wrote about him. Jesus said in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He

¹ Cf. T. Wax, Gospel-centered Teaching, 17.
² Cf. M. William, How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens.
saw it and was glad.” This is a striking statement about Abraham. Reflecting on God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, Paul in Galatians 3:8 said: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”

Apostles’ Teaching

The New Testament apostles read the Old Testament from the perspective of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Considering the risen Christ, the New Testament authors found the Old Testament filled with promises of Christ, types of Christ, and references to Christ. In Acts 10:43, Luke testifies about what Peter said, “To him [Christ] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Apostle Paul teaches that Christ is the key to Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3:15-16: “Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.” The knowledge of Christ removes the veil from the Old Testament. The Old Testament becomes clear only when understood through Christ who was predicted and prefigured there.

Also Romans 1:1-4 teaches that the gospel of Jesus was promised in the Holy Scriptures: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Cf. 2Ti 3:15.

1 Peter 1:10-12 says, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” The Old Testament prophesied about the grace of Jesus Christ. How did the prophets predict this? They did this by “the Spirit of Christ,” the Holy Spirit, who was in them. Like the New Testament apostles, the Old Testament prophets prophesied about grace and salvation through Christ’s sufferings and glories.


The Gospel-centeredness of the Whole Bible

What does it practically mean that we must interpret all Scripture through the Christ lens? It means to be centered around the gospel of Jesus. As the New Testament teaches, the gospel is the center of the whole Bible. The main message of the New Testament church was that God revealed himself and acted decisively in Jesus Christ. What is the gospel? John 3:16 says “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus the Son of God, lived, died in our place, was triumphantly raised from the dead, and exalted as King of kings. This was the fulfillment of God's promises in the Scriptures. In his name, we receive forgiveness of our sins.

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3 Cited by S. Greidanus, Preaching Christ, chap 5.
The Risen Lord is present on earth today through the Spirit, and he is coming again to bring about the new heaven and new earth. His church proclaims the gospel by the power of the Spirit. Therefore, to be Christ-centered means to be centered around the whole gospel of Jesus.

In turn, the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of the kingdom of God. As the Gospels testify, the center of Jesus’ work is the kingdom of God. In his redemptive history, God has planned and is establishing his kingdom. Focusing on Christ is as broad as preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. Therefore, to be Christ-centered means to focus on "Christ incarnate in the context of the full sweep of redemptive history." Refer to the gospel of the kingdom structures in the Bible (cf. Mt 1; cf. Ro 1:2).

In short, the gospel of Jesus is the focal point of the Bible. Every part of Scripture is linked to the person and work of Christ. What does this imply for Bible reading? It means that no part of the Bible can be correctly understood without him and his gospel. Therefore, proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the gospel of Jesus.

Reading the Bible from the reality of Christ is a two-way street. We can understand the Old Testament only in light of Christ. And we can only properly understand Christ in light of the Old Testament. A Christocentric reading of Scripture is reciprocal. See the diagram below. Entry to the OT is made only through the gospel of Jesus (A) that leads us to the Old Testament (B). With Christ (C), who is the focal point of the Bible, we follow progressive revelation until it leads us to its fulfillment in the gospel. In this way, the redemptive acts of God in the Old Testament enable us to grasp the work of Christ.

See illustration of flowers:

**Sunflowers from the backside:** Scripture is to be understood from the Old Testament to the New Testament as flowers unfolding their petals to the morning sun.

**Sunflowers facing the Sun:** The Old Testament is to be seen in light of Christ. "The Bible points forward to Christ, backward to Christ, and again forward to Christ in His glorious return and reign. Forward, backward, and forward. Everywhere you turn, there is Christ."

**Connecting Each Story to the Grand Storyline of the Bible**

To be gospel-centered, it is necessary for us to ask a basic question when we study a passage: How does this passage fit into the big story of Scripture? We should not read a Bible passage as we do with Aesop's Fables, which have unforgettable tales with a moral teaching (moralism). For example, in the Bible, there are many heroes. What is the purpose of these stories? Are they simply examples to be followed? Noah: persistence; Abraham: faith; David: courage; Solomon: wisdom; Daniel: determination, etc.? This understanding is true, but only half true. This is “heroes and villains approach” that is basically man-

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4 G. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture.*


6 G. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture,* 84f.


centered and moralistic. Instead, we have to connect each story to the big storyline of the Bible. In this way, we can see that the real hero of many stories is God. How is each part of the Bible linked to the gospel of Jesus? How do we make this connection? I present some helpful suggestions by T. Wax.

1. Read through the Bible chronologically. Probably the best way to see the big picture of the Bible is to read it chronologically. Follow a chronological reading plan. "Read the Bible for Life" by George Guthrie.

2. Read at least one Bible overview book a year: The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook: Connecting Christ Throughout God's Story by The Gospel Project; The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones; How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens: A Guide to Christ-Focused Reading of Scripture by Michael Williams; God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible by Vaughan Roberts; According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible by Graeme Goldsworthy.

3. Locate your passage in the grand storyline of the Bible. For example, the story of Joseph and his brothers can be a classic example of forgiveness, but we don’t stop there. Instead, we need to connect it to the grand storyline of the Bible: In the context of God’s promise to Abraham to bless the world through his descendants (a foreshadowing of that future blessing); Joseph betrayed by his brothers, suffering unjustly, but was providentially lifted to a position to save many lives; what his brothers meant as evil against him turned to good (Gen 50:20). The story of Joseph is not only an example of forgiveness, good triumphing over evil. But in the grand narrative, it points to an even greater salvation in Jesus who was betrayed and unjustly suffered at the hands of sinners, and was raised from the dead to bring the blessing of salvation to all peoples. The evil committed against Jesus on the cross was turned to good for the salvation of the whole world.

4. Point to Jesus as the ultimate answer to our sin problem. It is not about our interpretation skills. The goal is that we encounter Jesus, the Savior, as the Bible reveals him.

**Ways of Reading Scripture through the Christ Lens**

The risen Lord said that he was the fulfillment of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, that is, the entire Old Testament (Luke 24:44). St. Augustine, a church father, formulated this biblical truth in his famous axiom: “In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New the Old is revealed” (Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet). There are several ways of reading Scripture that do justice to its intrinsic connection. I’ll point out four among the most important concepts: 1. Redemptive-historical progression, 2. Promise and fulfillment, 3. Longitudinal themes, and 4. Typology (persons, events, institutions).

**Redemptive-historical Progression**

The entire Bible is about God’s redemptive history. In God’s redemptive history, progressive revelation is the general pattern of God’s revelation. God doesn’t reveal and work out everything at once. Rather, he acts consistently and progressively. Hebrews 1:1-2 teaches this clearly. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” In the Old Testament, God spoke by the prophets; in the last days, the New Testament era, God’s revelation was given through his Son, the perfect representation of God.

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9 D. Murray, Jesus on Every Page, 54ff.
10 T. Wax, Gospel-centered Teaching, 45ff.
11 B. Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 102.
Matthew teaches redemptive-historical progression in the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah: the son of David and the son of Abraham. Christ is the successor of a royal line and the fulfillment of the promise. Luke traces Jesus’ root through redemptive history all the way back to Adam, the son of God.

Paul also uses redemptive-historical progression to preach Christ. Romans 1:1-3 teaches that the gospel of God was promised through his prophets. Jesus’ coming is the fulfillment of God’s promise made to Abraham (Gal 3:24). Jesus’ coming is the climax of the redemptive history: the fullness of the time has come (Gal 4:4-5). According to Colossians 1:26, the mystery hidden throughout ages has been now revealed to his saints (cf. Eph 1:8-10). 1 Corinthians 15 proclaims that Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruits of God’s eschatological salvation.

Redemptive history or kingdom history is “the bedrock which supports all the other ways that lead to Christ in the New Testament.” From a perspective of the redemptive history, the New Testament links Christ to Old Testament events which find their climax in him. Because God progressively works out his redemptive plan, the New Testament writers preach that Christ is the culmination of a long series of redemptive acts of God.

Redemptive-historical progression detects some pivotal points in redemptive history. See the diagram below.

![Diagram of Redemptive History](image)

God’s redemptive history encompasses the scope from creation to new creation. In the Old Testament, we find the blueprint of all redemptive history: creation-fall-redemption-new creation. The OT testifies about God’s redemptive acts in Israel that point to Christ. The redemptive history culminates in Christ. The NT testifies about God’s redemptive acts in Jesus that are now being proclaimed in church and human history. All this is moving toward New Creation, which is the consummation of God’s redemptive history.

The theme of the Kingdom of God and covenant helpfully grasps the structure of redemptive history.

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<tr>
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<td>The Kingdom in Prophetic Hope</td>
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<td>The Kingdom at Hand</td>
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<td>The Kingdom Completed</td>
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12 S. Greidanus, Preaching Christ, chap 6.
13 Ibid., chap 6.
14 Cf. Peter J. Gentry & Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant; Graeme Goldsworthy, Gospel and Kingdom; Simon Vilbert, “Kingdom and Covenant in the New Testament.”
See the diagram below of the structure of the redemptive history.\textsuperscript{15}

![Diagram of the structure of the redemptive history](image)

Because redemptive history is a unified history, \textit{every part of this history should be interpreted in the context of its beginning and goal}.\textsuperscript{16} Reading the Bible from a viewpoint of redemptive history is especially critical to interpreting the Old Testament. It reads the Old Testament from the focal point of Christ. If we lose Christ from sight, we will end up reading the Old Testament like a pious Jew who does not know Christ. Therefore, we have to not only understand the passage in its historical context, but also understand its message in the context of the whole Bible, keeping the focus on Christ.

This does not mean that we do not impose the New Testament meanings on the Old. The redemptive-historical way does not bypass the literal-grammatical interpretation. Rather, it seeks to understand an Old Testament passage first in its own historical-cultural context. “After we have heard a passage the way Israel heard it, we can move on to understand this message in the broad contexts of the whole canon of the Bible and the whole of redemptive history.”\textsuperscript{17} So, we have to know the main point of the author and spend enough time in the passage. Then, we can get on the road to Christ in the context of the whole Bible. Here are basic rules of redemptive-historical reading: \textit{First, understand the passage in its own historical context. Next, understand the message in the context of the entire Bible and the gospel.}

The below diagram is a wrong model: Texts without the context of redemptive history.

\textsuperscript{15} Diagram drawn, based on G. Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture and V. Roberts, God’s Big Picture.
\textsuperscript{16} S. Greidanus, chap 5.
\textsuperscript{17} S. Greidanus, chap 6.
The diagram below shows contextual use of biblical texts, reading texts in a redemptive-historical context. The text (T) is first linked theologically to Christ as the focal point of all Scripture, and then the connection is made to the reader (H).

In a redemptive-historical approach, we should also avoid the pitfall of a quick identification of Christ with Old Testament figures. For example, if one of the angels who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18 is interpreted as a direct reference to Christ, we neglect progressive revelation. This interpretation short-circuits the task of preaching Christ as the fullness of God's self-revelation in his incarnate Son, Jesus. With that said, Christ-centered exposition of Scripture is not about finding Christ through mysterious skills of allegory. The goal is not to find innovative ways of identifying Christ in every text, making a specific reference to Jesus. Rather, the Christ-centered approach wants to show how every text contributes to the unfolding revelation of the grace of God that culminates in the person and work of Christ. It wants to identify how every text functions in the redemptive context, furthering our understanding of who Christ is, what God sent him to do, and why. This approach requires a sense of God’s redemptive history. We need to discern a progressive revelation of God’s grace throughout Scripture.

When we take redemptive-historical progression seriously, we can distinguish times, so as not to create a contradiction in Scripture. So, we should not force a New Testament standard of morality or doctrine upon an Old Testament passage. This implies also that “not all texts stand in the same relationship to the contemporary believer as others.” For example, there are differences between the way the Law of Moses applies to Old Testament Israel in the wilderness and the way it applies to contemporary Christians.

Promise and Fulfillment

In this section I largely follow S. Greidanus’ significant work, Preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Since the New Testament looks back at the Old Testament in light of the Messiah who has come, the concept of promise-fulfillment is foundational in interpretation. This concept functions within redemptive history because God makes his promises and fulfills them.

In the New Testament, the category of promise-fulfillment is much broader than fulfillment of specific promises in words. The word “fulfillment” was used for both promises and types. Matthew says: “all this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (1:22). But not all the quotations in Matthew’s Gospel are prophecies about the future. For example, Mt 2:15 says, “This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” This verse quotes Hosea...

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18 See G. Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible, 100.
19 B. Chapell, Christ-centered Sermon, Introduction, xiii; Christ-centered Preaching, 279.
20 B. Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 103-4.
21 G. Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible, 73.
22 See S. Greidanus, chap 5.
11:1. However, the verse in Hosea is not a promise or prediction about the future, but a statement about the past that God called Israel (Ex 4:22-23). In this case, Matthew uses the word "fulfill" not for the fulfillment of a promise, but for a type of Christ. So, the NT uses the word “fulfillment” for both promises and types (cf. Mt 13:35; Ps 78:2). *Fulfillment of OT types and promises is the way the NT reads the OT.*

**Promise-Fulfillment in the Old and New Testament**

In the Old Testament, God gave his promises to his people. He works out his promises throughout history. Some promises are already fulfilled within the Old Testament. For example, a promise to Abraham regarding a son (Gen 18:10) had been fulfilled (Gen 21:2): The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son” (18:10); “And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him” (21:2).

See promise of the land (Gen 17:8) and its fulfillment (Jos 21:43-45): “Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.”

God gave warnings against the sins of Israel and when they didn’t listen to him, they went into exile in 587 BC.

Other promises still awaited fulfillment in the Old Testament: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3); promise of the new creation (Isa 65); a kingdom that shall stand forever (Dan 2:44); “Your throne shall be established forever” (2Sa 7:16).

Even already fulfilled promises in the OT point forward to the future (cf. Jos 21; Heb 4). The New Testament teaches that Christ has fulfilled Old Testament types and promises: Jesus is the Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14), the Servant of the Lord (Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12), the suffering Servant of the Lord (Isa 53:12). Jesus said that the Scripture must be fulfilled (Lk 22:37). Paul also uses the way of promise-fulfillment to read Scripture and to preach Christ (cf. Ro 1:1-3; 1Co 15:3-4).

**Progressive Fulfillment**

When we apply the way of promise-fulfillment, there are some special rules to consider. The concept of *progressive fulfillment* is significant. God usually fulfills his promises progressively. In the Old Testament, a promise is fulfilled, yet it remains open to further fulfillment. The same is true with respect to Christ in the New Testament. As Christ fulfills Old Testament promises, he turns them into new promises of an even larger scope.

For example, in the Old Testament, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation and to bless all the families of the earth through him (Gen 12:2-3). *(How do you study Genesis 12 in your Bible study and apply it?)* This is a Messianic promise of God. God's promise to Abraham began to be fulfilled with the birth of Isaac and continued to be fulfilled with Exodus and David, so on.

The progressive fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in the Old Testament looks as follows:

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Abraham Isaac Jacob Egypt Canaan David Exile Remnant Future
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In Acts 2:16-21, when Peter on the day of Pentecost declared, “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel,” he was talking about the fulfillment of promises through Joel. At the same time, several of
Joel’s predictions still await fulfillment such as “the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (Joel 2:31).

In Isaiah 7:11-17, the Lord gave a promise of Immanuel and defeat of enemies. The sign of Immanuel was fulfilled first sometime before 732 BC when Tiglath-Pileser defeated both countries (Syria and Ephraim). But Mt 1:22-23 says, “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Immanuel’ which means, ‘God with us.’” The promise of “God is with us” finds further fulfillment in the promise of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Ac 2:4). “God is with us” will be ultimately fulfilled in a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:3).

A progressive fulfillment of this promise looks like the diagram below:

As we observe a progressive fulfillment in the biblical promises, we first move from the promise of the Old Testament to the fulfillment in the New Testament and then go back again to the Old Testament text.

Isaiah 61:1-4 say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... They shall build up the ancient ruins ... they shall repair the ruined cities” (1,4). This promise was initially fulfilled in the years following 538 BC when the remnant returned from exile. And Jesus said in Luke 4:21, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Here Jesus did not mention “the day of vengeance of our God” (61:2). “The day of vengeance” still awaits its fulfillment in the future.

The prophecy in Zechariah 9:9-10 was fulfilled in Jesus Christ when he entered Jerusalem. “This took place to fulfill what had been spoken though the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey’” (Mt 21:4-5). After seeing its fulfillment in Jesus, we move back to the prophecy in the Old Testament, and we notice elements not yet fulfilled: “He shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea
to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech 9:10). The fulfillment of this part is still in the future.

In studying the Bible and interpreting many messianic promises, we need awareness of further fulfillment. Here are some examples: the promise for David’s house (2Sam 7); the promise regarding a serpent-crusher (protoevangelium in Gen 3:15); “to your offspring I will give this land” (Gen 12:7); “though your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (Gen 22:18). In interpreting messianic promises, we should keep further fulfillment in mind. This enlarges our vision to the full scope of kingdom history. This helps us to have the prophets’ vision of God’s glory that fills the whole earth.

Longitudinal Themes of Scripture

Scripture testifies about the gradual development of themes because God progressively reveals more of himself and his will as he carries out his salvation plan in history.23 Those themes include kingdom, covenant, paradise and exile, presence of God and worship, rest and Sabbath, justice and judgment, righteousness and nakedness.24

**Kingdom**: We are made to live as his people under God’s rule and blessing. But sin is rebellion against the true king. God works out his kingdom plan throughout history. Jesus is the true king and his death and resurrection broke the power of sin, death, and Satan over us. To serve him is the perfect freedom.

**Covenant**: we are made to live in relationship with God. He established the covenant out of his sovereign grace. We are made to be his people; he is our God. In this relationship we find the blessing of love, justice, freedom, and peace. If we break the covenant, there is the curse of slavery, judgment and death. How can the holy God still live among his people who are unfaithful? Jesus became the man of the covenant who fulfilled the covenant perfectly and fully in our place. Those who are in Christ are in the new covenant in his blood.

**Paradise and exile**: due to our sins, we all are in exile. Salvation in the Old Testament includes living in the Promised Land. Who can bring us back home? Only Jesus Christ who was exiled and abandoned on our behalf, can bring us home to a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells.

**The presence of God and true worship**: we are created to live in an intimate relationship with God in his presence. How can sinners come near to a holy God? The Tabernacle/temple in the OT points to the gracious presence of God. In Jesus who opened the new way, we can come near to God (Heb 9-10).

**Rest and Sabbath**: We are created to enjoy rest, but because we try to earn rest by our achievement (or seek rest substitutes), we are restless. But in Jesus, who invites the weary and burdened, we rest from our performance and we can enjoy true rest, knowing God’s unconditional acceptance.

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Justice and judgment: the question about justice is central in the Bible. But who can stand if God kept a record of sins? (Ps 130:3) Jesus is the Great Judge of all. But he came into the world not to bring judgment, but to bear the judgment for us.

Righteousness and nakedness: because of our sins, we are ashamed and hide from the eyes of others and from God (Gen 2-3). Since Jesus was stripped naked on the cross in our place, we can now be clothed with the righteousness of God in Christ (Ro 1:17; 13:14; Isa 61:10).

Typology

Regarding typological interpretation, I’m mainly indebted to the works of S. Greidanus, E. Clowney, and G. Goldsworthy with whom I largely agree. Typology is a study of types. In the early history of the church, typology was a common way to see the unity of the whole Bible and to interpret the Old Testament. The word “type” is derived from the Greek word τυπος (typos), which usually means an example or pattern (in the New Testament). In 1 Corinthians 10:6, this word is used to speak of certain Old Testament Exodus events as a type of Christian life. In Romans 5:14, Adam is a type of Christ. So, a type foreshadows some future reality. The type in the Old is a shadow of the reality that is to be revealed in the New. And certain events, people, or institutions in biblical history prefigure later events, people, or institutions. The earlier foreshadows the later, and the later fulfills or completes the earlier.

(Typology is a kind of prophecy. There is a difference between types and promises: while promises are usually words spoken, types are historical events, persons, or institutions. While promises point to future fulfillment, typology generally moves from New Testament fulfillment to the past type.)

Typology functions within redemptive history. The true root of typology is the fact that in redemptive history, the purpose of God reached its climax through Jesus the Messiah. According to the New Testament, the messianic age has been ushered in through Jesus. Typology works because there is a continuity of God’s work of redemption as it unfolds through history. Within this redemptive history, God’s past acts of salvation are seen as shadows and types of the new age that has begun in Christ. The type is part of the progressive revelation that leads to the fulfillment in the gospel (or antitype). God reveals and works out his redemptive plan progressively in history. Typology works because God not only works progressively, but also acts consistently in redemptive history. God is consistent in his nature and actions. He works in consistent patterns. He repeats his actions of blessing and of judgment in history. His actions are based on his covenant faithfulness that enables us to believe in his grace in the future. Because God works out his plan in consistent patterns, the New Testament writers can perceive correspondences between God’s redemptive acts in the Old Testament and his acts in Jesus Christ. This consistent revelation in redemptive history is the basis of typological interpretation of the Old Testament.

Allegorical and Typological Interpretation: Typology is different from allegorical interpretation. Allegorical interpretation can easily go astray. Allegory explains a text by picking something in it and giving it an interpretation that is unrelated to the context. Allegorical interpretation reads an entirely foreign and subjective meaning into the passage to be explained, at times falsely giving it a proposed deeper meaning. But typological interpretation pays attention to the context and focuses on discovering

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25 S. Greidanus, Preaching Christ from the Old Testament; E. Clowney, Preaching Christ in All Scripture; G. Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture.
26 L. Goppelt, Typos, in: TDNT.
27 S. Greidanus, chap 5; Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 77; cf. Von Rad, Typological Interpretation.
28 Francis Foulkes; cited by Greidanus, chap 5.
specific similarities of God's acts in his redemptive history. Regarding history: While allegory takes no account of history, typology rests upon awareness of actual historical fulfillment.29

Typology needs to be carefully defined and handled with great care. A genuine type is grounded in God's design. We must be aware of dangers posed by an effort to read a more spiritual meaning (typologizing). For example, to some church Fathers each piece of wood was a reference to the cross, and every pool of water spoke of baptismal regeneration. Here, it is difficult to differentiate between allegory and typology. Some might try to interpret the blue, purple and red coloring of the tabernacle as pointing to Christ's heavensliness, kingship, and death. This is similar to allegorizing.

To avoid such extremes, we have to identify characteristics of a genuine type. Where New Testament authors mention or obviously echo how an Old Testament person or feature foreshadows the person and work of Christ, we have a genuine type. Clearly anything treated as a type in the New Testament must be interpreted as typological exposition.30 With this in view, we can summarize the characteristics of a genuine type as follows31:

1) A genuine type is historical. Only historical facts - persons, actions, events, and institutions - are material for typological interpretation.

2) A genuine type is theocentric. It has to do with God's acts in history. The biblical types are specific persons, events, and institutions as these are used by God in his dealing with his people.

3) A genuine type displays a significant similarity with its fulfillment in Christ. It is about a genuine resemblance in form or idea between the Old Testament reference and the New Testament counterpart. It is not interested in parallels of details but only in the similarities of fundamental principles.

4) A genuine type is marked by the heightening of the promise of God. God will not merely repeat his deeds of the past. He will do greater things, culminating in Christ: a second exodus involving deliverance from bondage to sin and death; a new covenant involving the blood of Christ, forgiveness and our transformed hearts; a new creation, a new people including Jews and Gentiles; a Prophet and Law-giver greater than Moses; a King greater than David and Solomon.

Kinds of Types

There are different kinds of types in the Bible. For the sake of simplicity, I’ll put them in three different categories as many scholars usually practice: persons, events, and institutions.

Persons:

Major figures in the Old Testament point to Christ: the strength in each character points to Christ or the failure in each character contrasts with Christ.

Adam and Christ Typology:

29 S. Greidanus, Preaching Christ, chap 5; G.W.H. Lampe, The Reasonableness of Typology”; B. Ramm, 221ff. Here are some allegorical wrong examples: the door in Noah’s ark represents Jesus’ speared side; Rebecca’s drawing water from a well represents drawing knowledge from Scripture; number 2 (the widow’s two coins; the Good Samaritan’s two denarii) stands for love.


31 S. Greidanus, Preaching Christ, chap 6; B. Ramm, Interpretation, 228-231.
The Adam-Christ typology is most comprehensively summarized in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. In Romans 5, Adam is “a type of the one who was to come” (τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος, Ro 5:14). Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Christ, indicating that Christ is infinitely greater. Analogy between Adam and Christ: “just as …so”: each is head of a new creation and each represents all. But Christ is the opposite of Adam: it is the antithetic typology, using two times “not like” to highlight escalation even more. “For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many” (Ro 5:15). The entire human race fell due to Adam's fall (Ro 5:12, 19). But by the obedience of Christ, the Second Adam, many are made righteous (Ro 5:19). He took Adam's fall and all people's sins upon himself.

Prefiguration surrounding Abraham: Abraham is the father and type of all who believe (Ro 4:11-12). Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection is prefigured: Isaac is the beloved son of the father: “Your only son ... offer him,” “to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Gen 22; Heb 11:19). Isaac stands for children of promise; Sarah stands for New Covenant and the Jerusalem above (Gal 3:26).

Melchizedek is prefiguration of Christ: King of Righteousness (Heb 7:2); a priest forever (Heb 7:3,17; Ps 110:4); greater than Abraham (Heb 7:4); High Priest due to his character, not due to his human descent (Heb 7:15-16).

Joseph is a rejected kinsman, but future savior.

Great leaders such as Moses, Joshua, the judges, and kings through whom God delivered his people and sought to establish his kingdom.

Moses is a type of a prophet promised (Dt 18:18). Moses is a type of Christ, who stood as a mediator between people and the Lord and established a new covenant (Heb 3). Jesus “was in the wilderness forty days” (Mk 1:13) recalling the forty days Moses fasted (Ex 34:28). Moses chose suffering for his people, looking to the reward (Heb 11:25-26); Moses gave manna in the wilderness (cf. Jn 6).

Joshua is a type of the captain who leads his people to the Promised Land.

The judges of Israel were deliverers of the Lord’s people. They are types of Christ, who is our true Deliverer from the bondage of sin. Jesus is the Judge of all the judges, including Gideon and Samson.

David is the type of an anointed King and deliverer. A man after God’s own heart (1Sa 13:14; Ac 13:22); a good shepherd; anointed king (1Sa 16:13). He saved Israel from slavery. David was the servant of the Lord (“my servant” in Eze 37:24-25). Christ is the Son of David and the Lord of David.

Solomon as the triumphant king governed his kingdom in peace and prosperity. Jesus is “greater than Solomon” (Mt 12:42).

Zerubbabel is a type of the Head of a new society.

High priests and priests are types of Christ in offering sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people and in interceding for them.

Anointed prophets are types of Christ in proclaiming the will of God to his people. Christ is the prophet whom all the prophets point to. Elijah is the type of John who was the forerunner of Christ.

Jonah (Mt 12:40-42): “As Jonah was...” Typology is not interested in all the details, but the parallels are restricted to three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster and repentance in Nineveh. The
typology places Jesus in the succession of God's prophetic messengers to men. God's continued sending of his prophets has reached its climax in Jesus and accredited the supreme call to repentance through his resurrection.32

Psalms: the righteous sufferer crying out to God may be a type of Christ. When Christ came into the world, he identified himself with the suffering people of God in the world.

Job: Christ is the true and better Job: the truly innocent sufferer.

Esther: Jesus is the true and better Esther, who didn’t just risk his life but gave his life to save his people.

*Restrictions in human figures: The great leaders of Israel are types only in the aspects God used them to do his redemptive work. E.g. Moses is not a type of Christ when he kills the Egyptian; Samson is not a type of Christ when he lived an immoral life; Aaron is not a type of Christ when he made a golden calf, and so on. The failure in each character contrasts with Christ.

Events:

Historical events of God’s deliverance - the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, victories over Philistines and other enemies, the return from Babylonian exile - are types of the great deliverance God has prepared for his people in Jesus Christ. Among them, the exodus typology is very significant.

Exodus typology:

- The Lord’s deliverance and the true Passover Lamb: Israel was to celebrate the Passover each year (Ex 12:14). It was to remind them of how the Lord graciously delivered them from bondage in Egypt. At the same time, it pointed forward to the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. 1Co 5:7 says, “Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.” We see the typological relationship between the annual sacrifices of paschal lambs (types) and Christ (the antitype or reality), who would save all people from everlasting death with his blood (see also Jn 1:29; 1Pe 1:18-19). See also Jesus as the corresponding reality of the Passover lamb whose bones were not to be broken (Ex 12:46; Num 9:12).

- Christ is the new Israel: Christ too came up out of Egypt after his flight as a child (Mt 2:15). He too went into the wilderness to be tempted. After forty days he overcame the devil (Mt 3:13-4:11). Scripture even speaks of his great suffering as his “exodus” (in Greek; NIV “departure,” Lk 9:31).

- The provision of manna and water: when Israel lacked food in the wilderness, God through Moses gave the people manna to eat. The manna in the wilderness is a type of Jesus himself: “your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever” (Jn 6:49-51). Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish (Jn 6). He feeds us with Himself, the Bread of Life. When Israel was lacking water in the wilderness, God told Moses to strike a certain rock and water would come forth for the people (Ex 17:6). Paul tells us that that rock was Christ (1Co 10:4). Jesus is the Rock of Ages from which a man may drink and not die but live forever (Jn 4:14; 7:37-38).

- Moses’ lifting of the bronze serpent: a type of the crucifixion (Num 21:9; Jn 3:14-15). “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Jesus compared himself with the bronze serpent that was lifted up. Again, the parallel is restricted to the lifting up, the faith required, and the life.

The heightening of this type is astonishing because it moves from those who looked at the serpent and lived for a while, to those who believe in the Son of Man and live forever.

- The wilderness wanderings: Wandering in the wilderness is an example for our Christian lives: “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (1Co 10:11). Hebrews 3:14-4:2 speaks of the rest: “make every effort to enter” the rest (the Promised Land).

**Institutions:**

**The Old Testament Temple and Sacrificial System**

The OT tabernacle/temple foreshadows “the true tent that the Lord and not any mortal, has set up” (Heb 8:2). Everything in the tabernacle points to his person and work. Jesus Christ is the true tabernacle. John writes, “the Word became flesh and lived [tabernacled] among us, and we have seen his glory.” Here, the Greek for “tabernacled” comes from the word for “tent.” John proclaims the fulfillment of this type in Jesus, the Word made flesh. God Incarnate dwells among us as God dwelt in the midst of his people during the Exodus. Israel’s tabernacle is a type of Christ’s saving presence among us.

John writes regarding the Word who became flesh: “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). This is the fulfillment of the type in Old Testament: “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex 40:34). Jesus revealed the full glory of God which the tabernacle did only in part.

The Old Testament priesthood prefigures Jesus, the perfect high priest and perfect sacrifice. The high priest is a type of Christ. “But Christ came as a High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:11-12). Christ is the perfect high priest: Christ suffered in every way like us (Heb 4:14-5:6). He is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. He entered heaven itself (9:24-28). Christ is the perfect sacrifice: he sacrificed his own blood (9:12-14; 10:1-10).

Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant (9:15). The Sinai covenant (regarding the sacrificial system) is a type of the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood. During the Last Supper, Jesus said, “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mk 14:24). This is a fulfillment of the Sinai covenant (cf. Ex 24). Below is the typology of the Sinai and New Covenants (See Heb 8-10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sinai Covenant (Shadow)</th>
<th>New Covenant (Reality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sealed with animal blood</td>
<td>Sealed with Jesus’ blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediated by a high priest</td>
<td>Mediated by Christ Jesus, our Great High Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal sacrifices (unblemished)</td>
<td>Blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God (unblemished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary, daily or yearly</td>
<td>Eternal, once for all for ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward purification</td>
<td>A new heart and new spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The feast in the Old Testament:** Old Testament Festivals are prefigurations of realities in the New Testament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OT Festivals Prefiguration</th>
<th>NT Reality</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passover (Ex 12:24-28)</td>
<td>Sacrificial death of Christ</td>
<td>1Co 5:7-8; Rev 13:8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:9-14)
- Resurrection of Christ/the final resurrection
  - 1Co 15:20-21

### Feast of Weeks/Pentecost (Lev 23:15-17)
- The Giving of the Holy Spirit
  - Ac 2:1-4

### Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:23-25)
- Return of Jesus; Judgment Day
  - Mt 25:30-31; 1Th 4:13-14

### Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29)
- Salvation through Jesus Christ
  - Heb 9:11-15, 23-25

### Feast of Booths/Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-43)
- Living in Fellowship with God
  - Jn 1:14;

- Living Water; Light of the World
  - Jn 7:37-39; Jn 8:12

### Water/Light motif

### Other Institutions

Sabbath/Promised Land pointed to salvation rest through Christ. Year of Jubilee pointed to liberation and salvation through Christ. The Davidic kingdom is a type of the coming kingdom of God that started to be fulfilled in Christ and will be consummated in his Second Coming.

### Rules for Using Typology

While typology is a significant concept in preaching Christ from the entire Bible, we should handle it with care to avoid pitfalls. I will now summarize some important rules for using typology as worked out by S. Greidanus and E. Clowney.\(^{33}\)

a) *Literary-historical interpretation* is foundational. We must know the author's message for Israel before we look for ways to focus the message in Jesus Christ and apply it to the church.

b) We are not to look for a type in every detail, but in *the central message* of the text.\(^{34}\) For example, while OT sacrifices and priesthood are foreshadowings of Christ, not all actions of the priests, and not all the elements of the sacrifices are prefigurations. What is typical must be judged from the New Testament. We should not boast of finding more types than other teachers.\(^{35}\)

c) We have to determine the *symbolic meaning* of the person, institution or event in the Old Testament. If it has no symbolic meaning in the Old Testament, it cannot be a type. Clowney emphasizes that an Old Testament event, a ceremony, or a prophetic action may symbolize a revealed truth at a particular point in redemptive history. Because this revealed truth will be carried forward to Jesus Christ, we can connect the event, ceremony, or action directly with that truth as it comes to full expression in Christ.\(^{36}\) This line of typology can look like the following diagram.\(^{37}\)

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34 Cf. Goppelt, Typos, 10.
35 B. Ramm, 229f.
37 S. Greidanus, chap 6.
Based on this understanding of typology we can discern illegitimate types. For example, the scarlet cord Rahab hung out her window in Jericho was not a symbol of the blood in the Old Testament. Therefore, it cannot really function as a type of the blood of Christ (but in the context, the cord was the sign of God’s promise and her faith, and God kept his promise and blessed her to be included in the family line of Jesus, the Savior). But as a type, the blood of the Passover lamb functioned in the Old Testament as a symbol of God’s protection from the angel of death. This type is fulfilled through the blood of Christ our Passover lamb who protects us from eternal death. Since the exodus was a symbol of God’s deliverance from evil slavery, it is a type of Christ delivering his people from the power of Satan.

d) We need to carry forward the meaning of the symbol as its meaning *heightens* in the New Testament. For example, manna in the Old Testament is a type of Jesus the bread of God (Jn 6). Is it legitimate to connect the provision of manna with Jesus’ teaching, “Give us this day our daily bread”?

Lambs being sacrificed as sin offerings (substitutionary atonement) are the type of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), not in the meaning of offering our best to God.

In addition, we have to note the points of contrast between the Old Testament prefiguration (type) and New Testament reality (antitype). In this way, we can identify the imperfect nature of the Old Testament type and the climax in the New Testament corresponding reality.

e) Finally, we need not only draw the line from the Old Testament to Christ, but also see how Jesus meets our needs in our situations.

**Christ-centered Application vs. Moralism**

Diagram of Moralism and Allegory (see below)\(^{38}\)

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Moralism attempts to directly apply the Old Testament truth revealed to us, without reference to the fulfillment of the truth in Christ. This moralistic application unconsciously assumes that we can come to God apart from the mediation of Christ. It doesn’t take into consideration the truth that God’s redemptive history culminates in Christ. If the moral life of believers is taken out of the context of God’s saving grace,

\(^{38}\) Modified based on E. Clowney, *ibid.*
it falls into a trap of legalism. While Christians are called to live a holy life according to God’s high standard, a Christian life should never be moralistic or legalistic. Rather, it must always be rooted in the saving grace of Christ and empowered by the Spirit.

Diagram of a Christ (gospel)-centered Interpretation\(^\text{39}\):

A gospel-centered interpretation seeks to see Old Testament events in light of their eschatological fulfillment in Christ: The Old Testament event \(\rightarrow\) its meaning \(\rightarrow\) fulfillment in Christ \(\rightarrow\) our preaching.

We can avoid moralism by asking the question: \textit{What is distinctively Christian about the way I am addressing this passage?} It should be the gospel that separates our teaching from mere moralistic teachings.\(^\text{39}\) What is distinctively Christian is Christ and his grace! It is good to ask if there is anything about my treatment of the Old Testament text that a pious Jew could not affirm. Regarding the New Testament: Is there anything about my treatment of the New Testament text that a cult group could not affirm? Is there anything about my treatment of the Bible passage that a moralist would be uncomfortable with? We should present the passage in a way that shows that there is a difference between morality and the gospel of Jesus. The gospel always goes beyond being “a nice person.” Therefore, in application, we should not start with the question, “What should I do?” but with the question, \textit{“Who is Jesus? What has he done?”} And then, ask questions about who I am in Christ before moving on to what I should do. Otherwise, we’ll give a lot of do’s and don’ts without mentioning the power source that enables us to do so.\(^\text{41}\)

For example, moralism presents David as the brave boy who challenged the bad giant Goliath and brought him down with his slingshot. So, is the main message to be brave like David? How about Samuel in 1 Samuel 15 who demanded that the enemy be brought in, and be put to death on the spot? To understand Samuel’s actions, we have to understand this story in the context of the Lord’s conquering of the enemies of his kingdom. The history of redemption has come to its culmination in Jesus Christ. If we don’t see its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, we could condone a holy war like Islamic terrorists wage. David fought against Goliath, not merely to display his courage and faith, but to fulfill the role of God’s anointed (1Sa 17).\(^\text{42}\) As the anointed, he had zeal for the Lord, trusted him, and delivered his people from their enemies. David as the Lord’s anointed is a type of Jesus Christ, who conquered Satan, and who delivered Satan’s captives (cf. Lk 11:15-19).

\(^{39}\) Modified based on E. Clowney, \textit{Preaching Christ}, 32.

\(^{40}\) Wax, 75ff.

\(^{41}\) Wax, 91ff.

\(^{42}\) Cf. E. Clowney, 34; G. Goldsworthy, \textit{Kingdom}. 
An example from the New Testament is the temptation narrative of Jesus in Matthew 4. We should not only mention strategies for resisting Satan, but also show that we have hope and victory because Jesus the Messiah overcame the temptations of Satan. We resist Satan not through our willpower, but in Jesus through the Spirit's power given to us through the obedience and victory of Jesus in the wilderness and on the cross.

**Concluding Remarks**

Why should our Bible studies be Christ-centered? We said that a Christ-centered reading of the Bible is reading it according to its original intention. Christ-centered reading of Scripture helps us to avoid the pitfall of moralism that may get in the way of our Bible studies.

Another reason why we should be Christ-centered is that only Jesus can save and transform us. The gospel of Jesus is the power of God for salvation! The power to save is not in our teaching skills, but in the power of the gospel of Jesus. The gospel of Jesus is the stumbling block to the Jews and to the Gentiles; in the gospel of Jesus, there is something to offend everyone. But it is the power of God for our salvation, working through the Spirit mightily. The gospel of Jesus is also the power of God for our transformation. The deeper we grow in Jesus, the more we progress in sanctification. The Christ-centered reader knows that Jesus Christ is not just the ABCs of salvation, but the A to Z of our Christian life.

A Christ-centered reading constantly draws our attention to God who is the Lord of history. It is fundamentally a way of worshiping God revealed in Christ. It cannot result in head knowledge that is disconnected from the reality of God. Rather, a Christ-centered reader will focus on God who works throughout redemptive history. Aware of his being ever-present, we will be guided to a humble and reverent attitude toward God. Accordingly, a Christ-centered reading commands us to intentionally seek the living God who comes to sinners to redeem them. Therefore, while reading the Bible, we can expect to encounter God who has graciously come to meet us. The more we focus on God, who is revealed in Christ, the more we will be drawn to him in awe and worship. Let’s ask ourselves: Am I reading my Bible just to prepare my lesson? Or, do I immerse myself in the gospel story daily, in awe and worship? As we immerse ourselves in the truth of Jesus Christ, we'll encounter him who can and will transform our lives.

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