

vocabulary and argument of the book are accessible because Allen clearly communicates his theology and he defines his technical terms well.

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*The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers.* Tony Merida. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016, 300 pp., \$29.99, paperback.

Tony Merida is Pastor of Preaching and Vision of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, as well as Associate Professor of Preaching and Johnny Hunt Chair of Biblical Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. His previous literary work includes *Faithful Preaching* (B&H Academic, 2009), co-authoring *Orphanology* (New Hope, 2011), and serving as a series editor of the Christ-Centered Exposition series, having authored several of the individual commentaries within the series as well.

In *The Christ-Centered Expositor* Merida finds a balance between the personal spiritual life of the expositor and the development and delivery of his message. The technical aspects of faithful redemptive exposition, which can be found also in other works such as Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker, 2005), Sidney Greidanus's *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Eerdmans, 1988), or Graeme Goldsworthy's *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2000), are given in detail, guiding the preacher through each step of the process. Merida pairs this homiletical guide with a helpful examination into the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification and preaching of the expositor, similar to Arturo Azurdia's *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Christian Focus, 1998) or Greg Heisler's *Spirit-Led Preaching* (B&H Academic, 2007). Combining the different emphases of these previously mentioned books, Merida champions the need both for expository preaching that is exegetically faithful to the text of Scripture in form and substance, calling attention to the need for preaching with a redemptive focus, and also for the integral nature of the devotion and sanctification of the expositor himself.

*The Christ-Centered Expositor* is Merida's affirmation that faithful exposition is, by its text-driven nature, Christocentric. The goal of this book is to help disciple-makers through Christ-centered exposition accurately "say what God has said in his Word, [declare] what God has done in his Son, and [apply] this message to the hearts of the people" (p. 21).

This book is clearly divided into two main sections, with chapter 1 serving as an introduction and the last being a short conclusion. The first section, titled "The Expositor's Heart," consists of chapters 2–7 and

discusses the spiritual aspects of the preacher's life that serve as the foundation for faithful exposition. The second section is titled "The Expositor's Message" and centers on the study, organization, purpose, and delivery of the sermon.

Merida believes the character of the one preaching is essential and thus he devotes one half of his book to this concept. According to Merida, "Apart from personal holiness, we do not have an expositional ministry" (p. 26). Effective exposition is done by those who are in a growing relationship with the Lord of the text. While a preacher may be able to accomplish sound interpretation through proper exegesis, a sound expositional ministry requires sanctification. We must "[p]ursue godliness for the sake of God-glorifying faithfulness and for ministry effectiveness" (p. 39).

Noteworthy is a discussion in chapter 6 of the need for the minister to establish and grow in prayer. Merida gives the reader reasons as to why devotion to prayer is necessary as well as a guide on how to cultivate this life of prayer. Merida states, "The examples of Scripture and Christian history magnify the importance of a praying minister. Faithful preachers and teachers are more than orators. They are individuals who spend unhurried and unhindered time with God in the prayer closet" (p. 112).

One strength of this book is that it encourages and guides preachers to be certain the sermons they are preaching are not devoid of the person and redemptive work of Christ. Merida describes his theological foundation for this approach to exposition when he states:

The Bible narrates the ongoing flow of redemptive history that moves ultimately to the person and work of Jesus. Therefore, exposition, at its best, will move inexorably to Jesus as the hero of Scripture. (p. 51)

This theological underpinning surfaces a significant issue found within the broader discussion of Christ-centered preaching. Merida's approach calls for the preacher to use a homiletic that declares Christ and His work at the center of the preaching act. Simultaneously he should utilize exegesis faithful to both the original intent of the author and the originally intended recipients. The issue arises in trying to avoid forcing a method onto the text. Merida's answer for this issue is to "look for the reason *why the text is there*" (p. 157). Remaining faithful to the text while being redemptive in focus can be accomplished by answering three helpful questions: "(1) Why is this text important and needed for fallen people? (2) What concerns do my listeners share in common with the original audience? (3) How is the redemptive nature of God displayed in the text?" (p. 159).

Another strength of this book is Merida's step-by-step guide into the building of a sermon from the studying of the text, to the building of an outline, to the elements of a sermon, to the actual delivery. This aspect of the book allows it to be more than just a work regarding the need and

theological foundation for Christ-centered preaching. This guide encourages the preacher toward faithfulness to a comprehensive expositional ministry. It does this by detailing how to preach with the redemptive work of Christ always in view and recognize that preaching always involves “*exhortation* because it calls people to respond or to act...*evangelism* because it is tied up with the heralding of the gospel...[and] *exultation* because it is an act of worship” (p. 10).

With today’s emphasis on practicality in preaching in mind Merida argues for viewing application as having two different categories: specific and transformative. Specific application is when the preacher can apply the text to an immediately appropriate and concrete issue. However, transformative application is when theological and gospel implications impact the hearts and minds of the hearers, thereby changing the way life is approached in general (pp. 181-82). Merida solidifies this concept elsewhere when discussing the problem of reducing a sermon entirely to one point and states, “The fact is you cannot develop someone’s worldview by offering one action step per week. It takes a thorough presentation of gospel truth over the long haul through careful, patient Christ-centered exposition” (p. 164).

Potential weaknesses of this book are minimal and should not be seen as integral. Perhaps Merida could have included some actual examples of sermons built from text to complete sermon outline in the appendices; however, he does include more than enough guidance for the reader to accomplish this. Also, the Conclusion was substantially smaller and did not tie the content of the book together as conclusions normally do. The Conclusion could have possibly served the overall construct of the work had it concluded the book similarly to the way chapter 1 introduced it.

This book is well written and done so at a level that would be beneficial for the seminary student, those who preach on a regular basis, as well as anyone who desires to preach in a faithful manner. Due to the helpful appendices and the guide to building and delivering a sermon, I could see this book being used as a companion text alongside a comprehensive sermon preparation guide such as *Power in the Pulpit* by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix (Moody, 1999) in a general preaching course or a primary text in a course specific to evangelistic preaching. This book would be a welcome addition to any preacher’s library.

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