

BOOK REVIEWS 136-153

***Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love.* By Edward T. Welch. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. 176 pp. \$14.99, Paperback. ISBN 978-1-43354-711-9.**

Ed Welch (PhD, University of Utah) is a well-known biblical counselor, author, and faculty member of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF). In this short volume, Welch offers not only a guide to discipleship, but practical means for believers, and especially members of a local assembly, to walk with each other through life.

The book is structured in two parts: “We Are Needy,” and “We Are Needed,” with each having short chapters applying to one of these major themes. Each chapter is also accompanied by a short section of questions to facilitate discussion, most likely for a small group or one-on-one settings.

In the first part, “We Are Needy,” Welch addresses the difficulty of life that all of us experience, even as those who have been redeemed by Christ. He speaks of this by focusing on the heaviness and busyness of our hearts and what happens when those two factors meet. He then speaks of the weight of sin on our hearts. All of this is to get us to the point of knowing that we need help and need to be willing to ask for help both from the Lord and from others. The whole thrust of this argument is that we would learn to trust others enough within the local church to be transparent and seek their help as we also seek the Lord.

In the second part, “We Are Needed,” Welch begins to unpack the ways in which members of the local church really can walk side by side. He begins this section with the reminder that we have the Spirit as the foundation by which we can truly help others. From there he initiates a pathway to breaking down the barriers we often feel in being transparent and building the kind of relationships we truly need and should have within the local church. He encourages the reader to move from simply greeting one another toward more intimate relationships where true helping can thrive.

There is really nothing to critique within the book. In fact, for such a compact work, Welch handles a lot of information skillfully. This volume would be helpful for elders to read through together as a means to develop a structure for a healthy discipleship environment in their local assembly. It might be something that, after reading together, the leadership would encourage their small groups or main disciple-makers

to go through as well. In this manner the book can serve as a reminder and encouragement of what living life together as a local church ought to look like. I highly recommend this little book as a way of having a big impact on a local community of believers who desire to not only come to church as an event, but be the church to one another in all of life.

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***Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the World of the Prophets.* By Aaron Chalmers. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. xiv + 173pp. \$24.00 Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8308-2468-7.**

Interpreting the Prophets by Aaron Chalmers seeks to fill a void among textbooks on the prophets. Chalmers teaches Old Testament and Hermeneutics at Tabor Adelaide, Australia. He is the head of the School of Ministry, Theology, and Culture at Tabor Adelaide and has also authored *Exploring the Religion of Ancient Israel*. He notes that most prophetic textbooks that focus only on the content of the prophetic books produce students who can simply parrot back the interpretations of others. Seeking to address this issue, Chalmers desired to write a book that teaches the “skills which are required to read the prophets well” and the needed “conceptual framework” (xi, 1). While still noting content where appropriate, *Interpreting the Prophets* focuses more on the tools needed for interpretation and can be used as a supplement to more content-based textbooks.

Interpreting the Prophets is comprised of six chapters covering (i) the question of “What is a prophet?” as well as the three “worlds” of the prophets—(ii) the historical world, (iii) the theological world, and (iv) the rhetorical world—(v) an exploration of apocalyptic literature, and (vi) a discussion of how to preach from the prophets. In chapter one, Chalmers notes contemporary understandings of the term prophet. He then turns to an inductive study of the Old Testament and concludes that a prophet is a member of the divine council, called by God, a communicator of the

Word of the Lord, an intercessor, and a sentinel. He also discusses ancient Near Eastern prophets (9), and the Hebrew terms *hōzeh*, *rō'eh*, and *nābi'* (11). The move from the prophetic word to prophetic book is described in three steps: (i) oral to written words, (ii) written to collected words, and (iii) collected words to prophetic books.

Chapter two, concerning the historical world of the prophet, is built on the premise that the prophetic books assume a shared knowledge with their intended audience that modern interpreters now lack. Drawing upon insights from archeology and utilizing maps, time charts, and images, a historical sketch of the time frame for the writing prophets is given. This section covers the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians while also noting the highs and lows of the northern and southern Israelite kingdoms. In this chapter, Chalmers also provides helpful guidelines for gleaning from secondary sources.

The Sinai covenant and the Davidic covenant with its attendant Zion theology are understood to be foundational to the theological world of the prophets in chapter three (68). Chalmers describes these important theological moments and exhibits how the prophets were not innovators, but those who built their messages upon this rich theological heritage. The chapter concludes with helpful guidelines for the student to identify theological terms and traditions within the prophetic works (85–86).

The majority of prophetic literature is poetry (118) and thus needs to be interpreted as such. Chalmers spends chapter four explaining literary devices such as parallelism, metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, hendiadys, and merism. He also explains how to discern a literary unit and goes on to discuss some of the prophetic forms, including judgment, salvation, disputation, lawsuit, vision report, and symbolic action. He is balanced throughout and cautions the eager interpreter not to be dogmatic, as the prophets were not slaves to the forms but utilized them for their own purposes (108).

Chalmers understands the apocalyptic genre to be a “subset of prophecy” which “grows out of prophecy” (121). In chapter five, he distinguishes it from traditional prophecy, since it (i) emphasizes a visionary revelation, (ii) often has a narrative framework, (iii) is mediated by a third party, and (iv) focuses on the end of history. In chapter six—preaching the prophets—Chalmers, in essence, continues to teach the skill of interpretation, but now addresses how to bridge the

chasm from “there” to “here,” or in other words, how to apply the prophetic books to today. In this chapter, he engages popular hermeneutical strategies, including the promise-fulfillment framework.

This work is impressive for how much it covers in so little space, while also making scholarly content accessible to the average reader. For example, Chalmers exposes the reader to tradition criticism, in chapter three, and to form criticism in chapter four, yet without the jargon. Tradition and form criticism for Chalmers have an immediate exegetical payoff and he helps the reader see this. Throughout his work, Chalmers also maintains a very balanced position on some of the disputed issues surrounding the prophets. For example, he rightly claims that there is very little evidence for schools of prophetic disciples (26). Redaction of prophetic literature may have begun with the prophet himself, yet it is “impossible to know how closely the written words matched the spoken word” of the prophet (26). With regard to the question of second-Isaiah, he writes, “It is clear, however, that even if these chapters are not the product of a separate prophetic figure, they are addressing a different historical context” (57 n 11).

Evangelicals have often been overly dogmatic on some of these issues that are unprovable, and Chalmers helpfully redirects them to the text versus what occurs behind the text. He argues that inspiration is located in the book, rather than the prophet, and that the interpreter ought to focus on the text, not the process of its origin (31). However, in turning to the text he does not advocate a reader-response hermeneutic, but advocates for the attempt to discover the authorial intention for the original audience (112).

Each chapter contains not only a section on guidelines for interpretation, but also potential problems to avoid. This is particularly relevant in the chapters on apocalyptic literature and preaching, in which Chalmers critiques an overly literal and historical interpretation (as promoted, for example, by Hal Lindsay) that is still popular in many churches today. He also critiques the promise-fulfillment approach to bridge the gap from Old to New Testament and cites Baumgärtel who states the existential irrelevance of typology (159).

While Chalmers is right that the promise-fulfillment approach can render the text irrelevant—focusing only on Christ and not how it also applies to the Christian—it could be argued that this occurs only when the promise-fulfillment approach is used in a truncated fashion.

Chalmers himself unabashedly argues for a Christian hermeneutic that seeks the fulfillment of the Old in the New Testament:

...the prophetic revelation must be taken through the lens of the New Testament to see what light it sheds on the themes, ideas and critiques the prophets raise. To put it bluntly, we cannot let the prophets themselves have the last word: to preach a sermon on an Old Testament prophetic passage without considering the teaching of the New Testament means that we are not engaging in truly *Christian* proclamation (154).

Moreover, the last two paragraphs of chapter six, in which Chalmers briefly explains how to understand Matthew's use of Isaiah seven, could be viewed as typology proper, contra Baumgärtel's caricature (160–162).

Interpreting the Prophets is an accessible, evangelical, and very practical handbook on how to exegete the prophets that handsomely supplements the traditional textbook that merely focuses on the content. Its function in the classroom should be evident, but it would also benefit the Christian wanting to dig a little deeper in order to learn how to understand this unique body of literature. Chalmers has succeeded in teaching the attentive reader how to fish for themselves.

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Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus. (Transformative Word) By Daniel L. Akin. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. 81 pp. \$9.99. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1683590606.

In a commendation of this slim little commentary, David Allen rightly describes it as a “wonderful little volume on a wonderful little book in the New Testament.” Part of a new series of commentaries from Lexham Press being edited by Craig Bartholomew and David Beldman, this commentary by Danny Akin, the President of Southeastern Baptist

Theological Seminary, is both practical and grounded in some of the key works of scholarship on this rich Pauline text.

An introductory chapter (1–5) provides an overview of the book and the key themes of the letter. With regard to the latter, Akin notes that “being... zealous for good works” is one of two major themes in the letter (4; see also 81, n.9), though curiously Akin does not mention it as a reason for the letter (5). Surely, central to Paul’s writing of this letter is the encouragement to believers to be ardent in the pursuit of doing good.

Eight chapters follow in which the text is carefully explained and reflection questions provided that help the reader deepen his or her understanding of the text and its application to life. Significantly Akin does not ignore or gloss over current debates about the interpretation of certain sections of the letter, such as the meaning of a “one-woman man” from Titus 1:6 (13), the role of women in the life of the church (30–35), and the importance of church discipline (63–70). Four of the chapters contain small-print excurses that deal with manhood and womanhood (36–38), slavery (43), the extent of God’s salvation (49), and church discipline (64). The footnotes at the end of the book (73–81) support Akin’s arguments, but also reveal the way he has carefully interacted with both the original text and also scholarship on the book of Titus.

All in all, this is an impressive and very helpful addition to the Lexham Press series.

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***Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon.* Ched Spellman. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014. 294 pp. \$110.00, Hardcover. ISBN 978-1909697263.**

In *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon*, Ched Spellman argues that the Christian canon serves as a hermeneutical control for the interpretative task. As

such, the concept of canon both “*guides and governs* biblical readers” (3). Spellman, Assistant Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Cedarville University, divides this work into five chapters.

In chapter one, Spellman provides the groundwork for the formation of and the definition of “canon,” as this chapter is an overview of the current state of research of the canon. Spellman helpfully provides an overview of significant historical figures (Zahn, von Harnack, Sundberg) and the distinctions they drew between “canon” and “Scripture” (23–32), as well as a brief overview of contemporary dialogue. He concludes noting that although many “traditional treatments of canon formation deal solely with external historical evidence and rely on extra-biblical references to biblical books or the canonical collection” (44), there is “a growing consensus that internal evidence from the biblical texts themselves can also shed light on the canon formation process” (45).

Chapter two focuses on “The Nature of Canon-Consciousness,” and Spellman distinguishes between Canon 1 and Canon 2. Canon 1 provides a broad understanding of what canon means, whereas Canon 2 describes a narrower understanding, or closed list of canon (46–47). Spellman navigates the reader through the detailed discussion of canon formation and argues that the early church inherited a canon and they “never existed without one” (99). He also shows the “canon-consciousness” of the biblical authors and their awareness of other biblical texts (60–82, esp. 65).

Chapter three discusses “The Canonical Feature of Contextuality,” in which Spellman notes that contextuality can be either “mere” or “meant.” Mere contextuality “is the effect that arises in the mind of the reader when writings are seen in relation to other writings” (110), and meant contextuality relates to how a particular group of writings is connected to the other works as deemed by someone else (120). For example, the Hebrew Bible concludes with Chronicles (123–128) and the New Testament concludes with Revelation (128–140). The location of these works within the biblical canon itself should be taken into consideration in the process of their interpretation.

Chapter four, “Intertextuality within the Canonical Context” examines the quotations, allusions, and echoes found throughout both Testaments. Spellman notes that it “is difficult to read any part of the canon without hearing ‘rumbles of intertextuality’” (148). Indeed, a

biblical author may employ an intertextual quotation from the Old Testament in the New Testament (154), an intertextual allusion (156), or an intertextual echo, which is simply a subtype of an intertextual allusion (159). It would appear, then, that the way to perform a “canon-conscious” reading of the Scriptures would be to pay attention to the intertextual (and contextual) links and to view the Bible as a coherent work that has been stitched together by these references.

The final chapter, “Identifying and Becoming the Ideal Reader of the Biblical Canon,” is a fitting conclusion to this work as it exhorts the reader to become the ideal reader of the biblical text. As is typical of Spellman, this chapter is full of the literary work that pertains to this discussion. Notable, though, is his section on how to identify with the implied readers of the biblical text. To seek understanding of the Scriptures is to confront oneself with the implied reader of the biblical text (200). The reader must “submit to the restraints of the implied reader” (201). This reader is nonetheless a Christian disciple of Jesus who “skillfully reads [the] texts” and can “follow the author’s intention” (205).

Spellman’s work is highly technical. If a reader is unfamiliar with the discussion of canon formation, the canonical approach, contextuality, or intertextuality, this book is not the place to start. However, this technical language does not make the work inaccessible. Those who persevere are rewarded with a coherent argument for how the Christian canon informs the interpretative method. Even though no new evidence regarding the Old Testament’s canonical function is provided, Spellman’s discussions of key figures within the canonical method (Childs, Sailhamer, etc.) are particularly helpful and informative.

Not all will agree with this approach, particularly his discussion of intertextuality and the canon setting the boundaries for interpretation. This, of course, would exclude ancient Near Eastern accounts that may correspond to biblical stories from the Old Testament or the Greco-Roman background for the New Testament. But this is to be expected. Spellman’s work seeks to produce a canon-conscious reader of the Bible, not background studies.

However, a discussion regarding when background studies are appropriate would have been helpful. For example, the “headdress” discussion in 1 Cor 11 has no appropriate biblical or canonical comparison. What is one to make of this canonically? Furthermore, a brief discussion regarding the difference between the Hebrew Bible and

that of the Septuagint would have been helpful. Although Spellman does mention this (Appendix I, II), there is no discussion regarding the differing locations of these works. Are Chronicles (and other works) to be interpreted differently because of their location within the Septuagint versus their place in the Hebrew Bible?

Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible will challenge the reader to seriously consider the implications of a canonical hermeneutic. Spellman is thorough, clear, and persuasive in his exhortation for the Christian disciple to become the ideal reader of the Scripture. Although not everyone will agree with everything Spellman argues, this is a helpful work that sheds further light on how the canon influences interpretation.

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***The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them.* By Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock. Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2016. 172 pp. \$9.97, Paperback. ISBN 978-1-78191-764-0.**

Certain questions linger throughout the ages: *What is the meaning of life? How did we get here? Who am I?* While some may attempt to skirt the first two, nobody can escape the third. A person's humanity confronts him on a daily basis. What does it mean to be a human being? Further, what does it mean to be a *male* human or a *female* human? According to the authors, modernity's prevailing answers have been unsatisfactory: "There has never been an age when masculinity and femininity have been so confused" (51).

In *The Grand Design*, authors Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock celebrate the Bible's answers regarding humanity by showcasing the beauty of complementarianism. It is no light issue: "Our earthly complementarity in marriage, all aspects of it, points to the heavenly complementarity between Jesus and His people" (161). The authors bring a wealth of insight to the topic: Strachan serves as Associate

Professor of Christian Theology and the Director of the Center for Public Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, and Peacock, a former professional footballer (or, in American lingo, soccer player), is the Director of International Outreach for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and a pastor at Calvary Grace Church in Calgary, Alberta.

The introduction sets a doxological tone as the authors argue that complementarianism should be understood not as “a sentence to misery but as a summons to happiness” (15). Chapter One outlines the core contours of complementarianism. While men and women, both created in the *imago dei*, share equal value and worth, God has intentionally designed men and women differently in terms of biology and role. This design lifts the eyes onto the mystery of Christ and the Church, telling the story of the gospel. Chapters Two and Three explore biblical manhood and womanhood and the God-ordained differences between the two. Chapter Four examines the practical outworking of these differences in the family, church, and culture at large. What does complementarianism look like in day-to-day life? How should husbands and wives interact in light of their differences? How does complementarianism inform how parents raise children? These questions and more are answered as the authors exhort readers to submit to the authority of God’s Word in these vital areas of life. Chapter Five brings biblical teaching to bear against our hyper-sexualized age. It reveals the incompatibility of homosexuality and transgenderism with the biblical vision of gender and sexuality. Further, it equips readers to lovingly and winsomely engage those who struggle with sexual sin. Chapter Six argues that complementarianism is not a doctrine to be simply jettisoned, regardless of cultural hostility (146). The book concludes with a summons to embrace the entirety of biblical teaching, including the portrait of biblical manhood and womanhood (169).

The Grand Design is an excellent introduction to complementarianism, and is of vital importance to contemporary evangelicalism. It orients readers to the importance and value of correctly understanding biblical manhood and womanhood. The book lifts high the biblical text even when it collides with current secular anthropology. It is sweeping in its application of Scripture to relevant topics of the present cultural hour.

Perhaps the most obvious addition the authors bring to the complementarian conversation is their distinctly positive tone. It is a book that argues what complementarianism is *for*, not strictly *against*. This is not to say that other complementarian works are overly negative; however, *The Grand Design* is crafted with a deliberate joy. Readers leave delighting in the differences between men and women rather than shying away from them. Because of this approach, the book serves as a helpful corrective to common misperceptions and mischaracterizations of complementarianism. Specifically, the authors go to great lengths in arguing that men are not superior to women in any way; indeed, “women are just as gifted as men” (76). The book routinely highlights the gifts of women. It stresses that men and women are not inferior to one another; however, God has designed differences so that men and women, husbands and wives, families and cultures may flourish according to God’s wisdom.

Before reading the book, this reviewer was concerned that certain persons may be left out of the discussion, namely singles. This reservation was quickly alleviated. *The Grand Design* speaks to every reader’s station in life, both the married and unmarried. The authors remind singles that “a woman doesn’t become a biblical woman when she gets married, in the same way that a man doesn’t need marriage to be masculine” (76). Singles do not bear an inferior status in the church. Rather than treating singles as a fringe minority, *The Grand Design* shows that they are as much a part of the body of Christ as those who are married and play a significant role in the Great Commission.

Another helpful feature of *The Grand Design* is that even though the book targets a general audience, it provides numerous footnotes for those interested in further research. These footnotes serve as a running bibliography of the most important complementarian works of the last three decades (as well as other works related to the topic). In these footnotes, the authors have left a venerable trail to follow as readers explore God’s design for manhood and womanhood in even greater depth.

While the book contains numerous strengths, one hesitation and one critique may be added. First, readers should be aware of one deeper conversation regarding complementarianism and Trinitarian theology that *The Grand Design* explores. Specifically, the authors posit that the Son eternally submits to the authority of the Father and that this

relationship should inform one's understanding of gender roles. It should be noted that Trinitarian relationships, while emphasized, are not the *sole linchpin* for the authors' understanding of manhood and womanhood. Throughout the book, the creation ideal of Genesis 1 and 2 and various New Testament passages play a central role in defending the book's thesis. Therefore, it seems the authors could avoid this contested Trinitarian view and yet articulate the same complementarian vision using the above passages. Nonetheless, even readers who disagree with the authors on this particular Trinitarian point still stand to benefit from their work.

Second, the book would be strengthened through more interaction with the alternative position—egalitarianism. Certainly, *The Grand Design* aims to display the beauty of biblical complementarianism, not survey other views at length. However, greater attention to how egalitarians arrive at their position may better equip readers to engage with them in constructive dialogue.

Despite these two critiques, *The Grand Design* is a superb volume that should occupy a high spot on the list of resources that pastors and leaders utilize as they disciple others in this pressing area. The book lends itself both to individual reading and to discipleship or group settings. Concise, robust, and well written, it will challenge and encourage readers to see the beauty behind God's design for men, women, singleness, marriage, and parenting. It helps answer the question "Who am I?" in light of the Great I AM.

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***The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers.* By Tony Merida. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016. 300 pp. \$29.99. Paperback. ISBN 13-978-1433685743.**

Preaching displays the glory of God as faithful men point others to the Lord Jesus Christ by expounding the Bible in the power of God's Spirit. To faithfully proclaim Christ and His Word, the preacher must both cultivate personal devotion and stir up a gift for teaching.

Tony Merida is well qualified to help preachers consider their character and mission. Since 2001, he has acquired substantial experience and training in the ministry of the Word, including a Ph.D. in preaching and service as a pastor and a preaching professor. *The Christ-Centered Expositor* is a revision of his 2009 book, *Faithful Preaching*, and maintains the same methodology while refocusing and adding material.

The book defines the task and goal of exposition, engages the preacher about heart issues, overviews the process of sermon preparation and delivery, and provides several practical tools as appendices. The two major divisions of the book focus on the expositor's heart and his message. Appendices include a historical sketch of preaching, advice for preaching in non-pulpit contexts such as weddings and funerals, a sermon outline sheet, and a sermon evaluation form.

The expositor is one who seeks to "responsibly, passionately, and authentically declare the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God" (12). Merida notes that the expositor must draw personal nourishment from Christ and the Word, pursuing Christlikeness through the spiritual disciplines, such as Bible intake, prayer and repentance, and living in community with the church. He must love the Scriptures, which testify to Christ, and love to preach Christ from the Scriptures. He must rely on the Spirit's power and cultivate a vibrant prayer life, since he must receive power from God for a life and ministry that please Him. The expositor must be shaped by an all-consuming desire for God to be glorified in his life, including his preaching and teaching.

To preach expository sermons, the preacher must cultivate his relationship with God and labor in his study of the Word. Merida writes, "Expository preaching involves explaining what God has said in his Word, declaring what God has done in his Son, and applying the message to the

hearts of people” (16). To preach in this way, he gives five steps for one’s sermon preparation: 1) study the text; 2) unify the redemptive theme; 3) construct an outline; 4) develop the functional elements; and 5) add an introduction and a conclusion.

Faithfully preaching the Bible starts with carefully studying the Bible. As the preacher digs into the text of Scripture, he must not only locate it in its immediate historical and literary contexts, but in the bigger picture of God’s plan of redemption in Christ as it unfolds throughout the Bible. He must find the main point of the text “through careful exegesis of the selected passage” and then develop the main point of the sermon “in view of the meaning of the text, the redemptive elements in the text, in light of our particular audience and occasion” (152). The outline should flow from and support the main point of the sermon while also reflecting the structure of the text. Explanation, application, and illustration further augment the outline by demonstrating the clarity, relevance, and authority of God’s Word. Having a clear grasp of the sermon’s point and outline, the preacher is ready to develop an introduction to raise interest and orient hearers to the text and a conclusion that calls for a proper response to the Word. Merida states that through these steps, the preacher’s study yields an expository message from which he may prepare a manuscript or brief notes. Regardless of the written aids used, the expositor needs to pray over and internalize the message before preaching. While each preacher has his own personality, he must avoid distracting behaviors and seek to clearly and passionately communicate the unchanging gospel, while addressing challenges of diverse worldviews and biblical illiteracy.

The Christ-Centered Expositor is a strong addition to the multitude of preaching handbooks. Merida effectively integrates and balances the spiritual life of the preacher with the mechanics of preaching, keeping the focus on Christ in both areas. This integration distinguishes the book, since many preaching books focus on the technical aspects of preparation and delivery of the sermon, while assuming or ignoring the preparation of the preacher and the “Christocentric emphasis” present throughout the whole Bible (54). The preacher must be continually transformed by the gospel and His relationship with Christ, and must continually proclaim Christ as he studies and shares the message of the text. The book effectively breaks down a five-step method which beginning preachers can use and from which experienced preachers can

learn. Chapters conclude with summaries, followed by study questions or exercises which can be used to practice the concepts. By including a substantial bibliography, a sermon outline template, and a sermon evaluation form, the book offers further help for preparing and assessing one's sermons. While Merida interacts with other preaching books, cites sources, and uses theological terms and categories, he still writes in an accessible, clear style. These features make *The Christ-Centered Expositor* suitable for a preacher's self-study, useful as a discipleship resource for mentoring, and commendable as a potential textbook, supplemental reading, or book review option in a formal preaching or ministry class.

With all of the aforementioned positives, one small critique can be made. While the book follows a helpful flow and organization, chapter fourteen, "Contextualize the Message," seems out of place after the chapters on sermon preparation and delivery. A treatment of contextualization might have been better located near or integrated with chapter eleven, "Step 4: Develop the Functional Elements," especially since it intersects with the element of application, requiring serious consideration of how Scripture speaks to modern cultural challenges. Such consideration should influence the message *before* the expositor stands to preach.

In the end, the fact remains that in any age and culture, the faithful expositor must be one who seeks to glorify God through preaching Christ and His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. *The Christ-Centered Expositor* provides fresh encouragement and instruction for such preachers and deserves to be widely read and used.

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***The Paradox of Generosity.* By Christian Smith & Hilary Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 261 pp. \$33.95, Hardback. ISBN 978-0-19-939490-6.**

There is no doubt that generosity plays a large role in Christian theology. Proverbs 11:24-25 and Acts 20:35 state that those who give also receive.

One could cite Matthew 20:16 as the great paradox of the Christian life: "The last shall be first." Jesus was the most generous man who ever lived (he gave his life for those who hated him) and because of this, he gained more than anyone will ever achieve (the name above every name, Philippians 2:8-11). Is this paradox only true for the Christian, or is it true for all? Though the thesis of *The Paradox of Generosity* is not driven by a Christian agenda, Smith and Davidson set out to prove that those who live generously live more fulfilled and happy lives than those who are ungenerous.

The authors move through scientific, economic, and sociological theories to build their case for generosity's paradox. In chapter 1, surveys given to Americans are summarized in graphs which show those who are more generous with their time and resources enjoy life more. For example, one chart shows that those who describe themselves as "extremely generous" also describe themselves as being in excellent health (34). The opposite is true for those who describe themselves as "extremely ungenerous." This is one of the many ways the data from the surveys imply that generosity affects a person's overall happiness. Though the data is compelling, the survey questions are subjective at their core. How does one determine *what* generosity means to an individual person? How does one discern the differences between "very generous" and "somewhat generous?" At most, the authors can only say definitively that people who *perceive* themselves to be generous often also *perceive* themselves to be happy.

Chapter 2 does, however, give helpful caveats. The authors explain that the data collected should not imply strict causation: "Some of the most generous people can actually struggle with personal finances and health difficulties" (50-51). People with a lot of money are not always generous, people who are generous are not always happy, and people who are happy are not always generous. With these clarifications in the background, the authors then posit nine different tendencies of people who are generous. These tendencies include physical healthiness, strong social networks, and general selflessness. The authors describe these effects of generosity as "positive psychological consequences," yet for the Christian, these effects can only be described as holistic obedience to Jesus (63). Everything the world calls a "psychological consequence" of generosity is, in Christian terms, the reality of a life lived in adherence to

the Word of God. We are generous because of Jesus. We are not social, healthy, or selfless because of our generosity.

The remainder of *The Paradox of Generosity* (chapters 3-5) is full of case studies, stories, and interviews about generous and ungenerous people. Though the stories shed light on cycles of ungenerosity, they do not necessarily convince the reader of measurable evidence that “those who give their resources away, receive back in turn” (224).

In chapter 4, for example, the authors share a short story of a lady named Sarah Walker in Michigan. Sarah is a mother of eight who desires to further her education and work experience. She does not pursue her goals because she “feels stuck,” the authors write (156). Yet the authors declare that the reason for Sarah’s lack of motivation is because of her lack of generosity. Nowhere in Sarah’s story does she (or the authors, for that matter) mention that Sarah is ungenerous. Maybe she is greedy, but even if she does not give to the poor, share her time with those in need, or volunteer, it may not be the reason she feels stuck. There could be a plethora of other reasons, including discontentment with her season of life, which could not be fixed by tithing or volunteering more.

This example is helpful to show some of the inconsistencies in the authors’ use of case studies to bolster their thesis. Humans are complex. Humans are sinful. The authors do well to show instances where greedy behavior is attached to other negative feelings or circumstances, and where generosity is often connected to other positive behaviors. However, these instances where a generous person is also a kind, moral, and happy person may be true in some cases, but not all.

Overall, the authors successfully defend their thesis in part. To some degree, Smith and Davidson prove that generous people are often happier than ungenerous people. But this is as far as the statement can go. It cannot be absolute because the authors do not make this declaration from a biblical worldview. The Bible is the missing element to the thesis of *The Paradox of Generosity*. The Bible reverses the thesis. Instead of generous people receiving happiness and a fuller life because of their generosity, the Bible states that because we are given all things by God and *He* provides all good things through Jesus, we give freely (Matthew 10:8, James 1:17). Proverbs 11:25 and 22:9 say that God will bless generosity. Yet we cannot be generous unless God first gives to us. This is the true paradox of generosity. God gave to us so that we can give

back to Him and others. *The Paradox of Generosity* states that when man gives, he receives. The Bible says that when God gives, we receive.

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