



THE CORNERSTONE BIBLE
COLLEGE AND SEMINARY

**OUR PASTORAL
TRAINING
DISTINCTIVES**

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INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF SEMINARY

What is the goal and purpose of seminary, or more broadly what is the aim of theological education? At the very least, theological education should provide tools to better equip pastors and ministry leaders. It is why our curriculum includes robust training in the original languages, exegetical, systematic, and practical theology, church history, homiletics, and missions. However, it does not end with knowledge and learning. The aim of education is a holistic one, whose goal is to produce a change in thinking, affections, and behavior. It is a joining together of what the mind has learned with the feelings of the heart and the practice of the Christian life, to the glory of God in Christ by the Spirit.

As you will see in our pastoral training distinctives that follow, we do not want to train tadpole pastors (with big heads and no bodies!). We want to equip men in the pastorate to be Christ-centered expositors of the Scripture who love and shepherd the flock of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 1

CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS

Written across the door to our seminary are the words, “To Exalt and To Proclaim.” As I sit here in my office writing these words, I remember our inauguration dinner in 2004 when our first president Steve Fernandez urged those present, “We want Christ to come here! Not somebody that’s known around the country, around the world. We want Christ to come here! Let him come through the doors! He’s who we need! He’s what our people need...By God’s grace he can raise up men who can preach this. May God, if he so chooses, grant that he can use this for his glory, [be]cause he uses crooked sticks to draw straight lines.”[1]

Entering into our 13th year, I want to reflect on what it means to exalt and proclaim Christ, to be a Christ-centered seminary with a Christ-centered curriculum. Sadly, Christ-centeredness has become a favorite saying in our Christian circles and is frequently measured by how often Jesus Christ is mentioned or an attempt to force Christ into texts when he is not there rather than explaining what it means for all the Scriptures to point to Jesus and for him to be supreme and sufficient in the Christian life.

[1] Steve Fernandez, “Christ’s Infinite Fullness” (Sermon presented at the Inaugural Service, The Cornerstone Seminary, Vallejo, CA, September 27, 2004).

Christ-centered expository preaching then, begins with the recognition that divine revelation is progressive and its goal is the revelation found in Jesus Christ. Because he is the theme and goal of Scripture, any interpretation or application without Christ is sub-Christian. Furthermore, all of our Christian education at Cornerstone ought to be Christ-centered. As Duane Litfin, in his book, *Conceiving the Christian College* explains, “To speak of Christ-centered liberal arts education is to make the claim that Jesus is the centerpiece of all human knowledge, the reference point for all our experience. It directs our attention to the only One who can serve as the centerpiece of an entire curriculum, the One to whom we must relate everything and without whom no fact, no theory, no subject matter can be fully appreciated. It is the claim that every field of study, every discipline, every course, requires Jesus Christ to be understood aright.”[2]

My conviction is to hold firm to the distinctive of Christ-centeredness at The Cornerstone Bible College and Seminary. The central thread of our curriculum and instruction will continue to be Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency for his people. Students will learn how to study Scripture, craft sermons, and conduct their shepherding ministry with the goal of making Christ and his gospel known.

Further, because Jesus Christ cannot be known apart from his trinitarian role and relations to the Father and Holy Spirit, it will be a Christ-centered Trinitarianism. We will prepare men who will pursue the glory of the Triune God above all things and give their attention to careful Christ-centered exposition of Scripture in order to lovingly shepherd the local church.

[2] Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 64–65.

CHAPTER 2

PASTOR-PROFESSORS

Much of my pastoral ministry has been bi-vocational. For many years, my non-pastoral job was spent working in the Bay Area oil refineries in project controls and construction management. In that industry, education (e.g., engineering, chemistry or construction management degrees) is supplemented with internships, on-the-job training, and associations that emphasize the importance of “real-world” experience.

Those who trained me pastorally held to the same philosophy. Whether it was my internship at Grace Church of Napa Valley, my schooling at Grace School of Theology and Ministry and The Cornerstone Seminary, or the mentoring I received from those who ordained me to eldership (Frank Griffith, Steve and John Fernandez and Phil Howard), I was pointed toward theology and ministry that was immediately applicable in the local church. It is why TCBS continues to be committed to the “Pastor-Professor” model of teaching.

Christian education is not complete until it encompasses formation habits through reaching the affections. Thus, it necessarily begins with a Christlike example of pastoral-professorial ministry.

Further, this formation happens primarily through a classroom atmosphere that promotes a response of worship. James K.A. Smith writes, “Such formation [of habits] happens not only, or even primarily, by equipping the intellect but through the repetitive formation of embodied, communal practices.”[1]

As pastor-professors, then, we desire to be intentional about both the content and application of curriculum, as well as the classroom habits and atmosphere. We want consistent pastoral application of the curriculum to be reinforced through my own ministry examples and times of classroom devotion. Additionally, we endeavor to model high-quality research-scholarship through the classroom methodologies and curriculum that is, in itself, an act of worship (1 Cor 10:31). As a result, our curriculum and assessments are designed to be practical in nature and immediately applied in the student’s own local church and ministry setting.

Finally, as pastor-professors, our commitment to pastoral and leadership development that flows from the reservoir of our own scholarly pursuits combined with our current practice of pastoral ministry helps alleviate the misunderstanding that one cannot be both a pastor and a scholar. It also provides a corrective to both the anti-intellectual pastor and the scholar disconnected from the life of the church.

[1] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 10.

Gerald Hiestand argues for the necessity of the pastor-scholar paradigm:

a paradigm in which pastors not only read scholarship, but write scholarship—thus returning a distinctly ecclesial voice to evangelical theology. Evangelicalism, I believe, is once again in need of theologians—such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Wesley—who live and move primarily within the social location of the local church. It is, I will argue, more than a coincidence that the majority of history’s most enduring theologians were churchmen.[2]

By following this pastor-professor philosophy of education, we believe that we can best model to our students what it looks like for a pastor to be a Christ-centered expositor who loves and shepherds the flock.

[2] Gerald L. Hiestand, “Pastor-Scholar to Professor-Scholar: Exploring the Theological Disconnect Between the Academy and the Local Church,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (Fall 2008): 357.

CHAPTER 3

LOCAL CHURCH ENGAGEMENT

The Lord Jesus loves the local church, and in love, he gives to the church shepherds and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). This reality means that some form of theological education is part of the very essence of the church. At Cornerstone, we know that we do not replace the discipleship and teaching of the local church. We do not ordain pastors, nor do we send out church planters or missionaries. Our task is to assist the local church by equipping students to minister and serve the local church. Our collaboration with churches in the training of fruitful leaders is essential for the edification of each local body of Christ.

When I became a professor, I began to understand the importance of emphasizing local church engagement. I have the responsibility to direct the conversation, answer the questions, and emphasize the application of doctrine in my student’s local church ministry. How will I carry out this task? For the academically minded, the temptation is to become content with knowledge alone and measure student success by essays and exams. John Frame’s words about the church ring true about the classroom as well:

The church is not an academic debating society, not a place where one seeks by whatever means to prove himself right and to prove the other guy wrong. It is, above all, a place where we care for one another as nursing mothers care for their babies. And if that atmosphere of caring, protecting, nurturing, and loving is ever replaced by an adversarial climate, the very life of the church is in danger. [1]

This danger is why our instruction at TCBS intends to provide students with a pursuit of theological depth together with a practical focus on a love for Christ and his people. A proper balance in the classroom both fuels and saturates effective Christian ministry. Theological training is not merely an end in itself, but rather a means of glorifying the Triune God and fulfilling the Lord Jesus's Great Commission.

For example, preaching is a manifestation of the pastor's love for the flock, and as a priestly duty, an act of worship to God as the preacher uses his spiritual gifts to serve the church. Furthermore, preaching is relevant to personal needs, because it is preaching that points to the all-sufficiency of the Father's provision by the Spirit in his Son. When brother and sisters are delivered and helped by the sufficiency of the Gospel, Christ is glorified and exalted, both in the preacher and in the people. However, expository preaching is not the end goal. Shepherding is the end goal.

[1] John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 941.

Expository preaching is one of the main tools that a loving, kind, gentle pastor uses to take the Gospel and apply it in the lives of their people in such a way that they see that Christ is all that they need. They see his sufficiency, and as a result, they exalt and proclaim Him. Thus, theological education while engaged in ministry at the local church is the most strategic training we can provide here at Cornerstone as we seek to exalt Christ and love his church.

CHAPTER 4

MENTORSHIP

When I was a student at The Cornerstone Seminary, I greatly appreciated the mentorship I received. My professors wanted to produce in me a love for Christ and his people, as well as an accurate handling of the Scriptures that would produce in me Christlikeness and personal holiness. Now that I am one of the professors, I too want to teach in a way that reaches the affections through formation rather than simply information. Here at TCBS, all of our professors foster meaningful personal relationships between teacher and student as well as between student and student and encourage significant and consistent interaction. Also, we model and motivate students by active participation in the life of the local church and not just in the classroom.

In this way, as mentors, we desire to obey Christ's command to make disciples (Matt 28:18–20). A disciple is a “learner” or a “follower” who will emulate a teacher's way of life in order to reproduce what they have learned in others (2 Tim 2:2). Like the Apostle Paul, we want to be able to tell our students to “be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), holding our students accountable to be “doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (Jam 1:22–25). Thus, we believe instruction ought to push past the level of worldview and cognition into the realm of affections and worship.

In our classrooms, we have the opportunity to take a learner for a brief slice of time and guide them in what Justo González calls “a constant learning about God, God’s world, and the purposes and actions of God in the world, as well as a constant growth in obedience and service— that is, a process of sanctification that is spiritual as well as moral and intellectual.”[1]

Our goal as professorial mentors is to explain the course content and direct it in a manner so that the student can practice applying it through the in-class development and defense of their own theology, as well as encouraging them to implement the course content into their own personal life and ministry. In this way, the student will be committed to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, they will be concerned about their own spirituality, they will show biblical discernment as they investigate and interact with various types of literature, and they will learn in community through peer-to-peer relationships.

Just as the church exists to worship, so too the education aim is to promote and enlarge a response to learning of worship. God is not only glorious, He loves his glory with infinite passion (Isa 48:9–11) and does everything for his own name’s sake (Ezek 36:20–23). Christian education flows from the fountain of worship, adoration and passion for God’s magnificent glory to be known by others (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15; Eph 5:19–20). Students will be better equipped to minister to the church and advance the kingdom when they see education as an act of worship.

[1] Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 128.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read through our pastoral training distinctives. Based upon these four commitments of Christ-centeredness, pastor-professors, local church engagement, and mentorship, I am convinced that our students will deepen their understanding in the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ, learn from seasoned professors, gain tools to better love and shepherd the flock, and apply that training in their local churches.

Whether you are currently in pastoral ministry or are considering it in the future, we want to give you the tools you need. Apply online at tcbs.org/apply.

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