

Illustrating Christocentricity for a Single Verse

Having considered themes in Genesis and in the passage 15:1-6, let us now illustrate aspects of Christocentricity at the level of a single verse. Christocentricity belongs to OT verses by virtue of meaning relations with other verses and passages.

Let us consider a less prominent verse with Gen 15:1-6, namely verse 3: "And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no offspring ...'" One way of considering the larger significance of this verse comes from reflecting on why a situation with no offspring comes to exist at all. This verse 3 has a thematic contrast with the fruitfulness promised in Genesis 1:28, which includes offspring by implication: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ..." What makes the difference between the blessing described in Genesis 1:28 and the situation of frustration in Genesis 15:3? The obvious watershed is the fall of Adam. Given the fall, the favor of God that Abram experiences in 15:1-6, even in the midst of his temporary frustration, is a picture of grace. And Abram's response to God relies on this grace. Grace solves the demerit from the fall. As a result of the fall, Adam and his descendants lack proper standing before God. God acts to overcome Abram's lack.

Now grace is possible only through Christ. In Genesis 15:1-6, the

vision, the word of God, and the blessing are all mediated to Abram in a manner that must be consistent with God's justice. Grace is free from the standpoint of Abram's side, but from the standpoint of God it must be consistent with justice. And this requires dealing with demerit by means of substitution.

(This overall context, by the way, excludes the interpretation of verse 6 as if it meant that God accounted Abram's faith as righteousness in an analytic sense, that is, because his faith was itself a righteous act. That interpretation ignores the necessary presence of grace.)

PHRASES AND CLAUSES

Now let us illustrate some ways in which Christocentricity belongs to texts by virtue of relations, at the level of phrases and clauses. In Genesis 15:4, consider the phrase "the word of the LORD." God spoke to Abram. This phrase in context resonates with all the earlier speeches of God to man in Genesis. Ever since the fall, God's speech needs to be mediated to avoid death of the recipient. The mediator is the Son, the Word. Because of the necessity of mediation, we can confidently infer the presence of Christ and his work when God speaks to Abram. Christ's role in Genesis 15:4 anticipates his incarnation and verbal ministry on earth.

Genesis 15:4 also resonates with the speech of God in Genesis 1, which powerfully brings about what it specifies: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:3). In like manner, in 15:4-5 the word of God guarantees an heir beforehand and specifies authoritatively the nature of the heir. Both of these kinds of speech, in creation and in covenantal promise, are reflections within time that reflect the archetype, the eternal Word who is spoken by God, expressing the nature of God.

EMBEDDING THE WORD OF GOD

Consider also that the word of God can be embedded in the word of God. Genesis as whole book is the word of God, and in it is embedded the quotation in verse 15:4 from what God said at a particular point in the life of Abraham. Moreover, 15:4 could have included another level of embedding in turn, by quoting from what God said to Abram at Genesis

12:2 or 12:7 concerning Abram's offspring. 15:4 does not elaborate using the exact words of the earlier speeches in Genesis 12, but there is nevertheless an allusion to them. It is a kind of indirect embedding of an earlier divine speech. We may include also God's mention of offspring in 13:15-16.

How does it happen that the word of God can embed the word of God? Embedding of this kind involves a kind of miniature transcendence.¹¹ Human understanding, as a finite, created imitation of divine understanding, is capable of standing back from immediate involvement in a situation and grasping the whole. In this case, the whole is the earlier oral communication to Abram, which is actually several wholes that are brought together in an act of miniature transcendence.

Now miniature transcendence is possible to mankind because man is made in the image of God. The original, the archetypal image is not man but the divine Son, as seen in Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3.

Man's thoughts exercising miniature transcendence echo the thoughts of God. And on the divine level the Son is the original image echoing the Father. The word of God can echo the word of God, thereby reflecting the relation of the Father to the Son in the original divine instance of reflection.

Do we perhaps think that these reasoning are a stretch? The divine speech and activity is the archetype on which specific manifestations depend. In creation and providence, God does not depend on eternal abstractions outside himself, but on himself as the absolute origin. Thus there is a genuine relation between the original instance of communication in the relation of the Father to the Son, and ectypal instances in the world.