

Biblical “Centeredness”

garywaldecker.net/archives/1225

gtw

What is the difference between “God-centered,” “Christ-centered” and “grace-centered?” These are three words I hear quite a bit, and my sense is that they are used as if they meant exactly the same thing. I see them as different and complementary ways of focusing the message of the Word of God. They are implied in one another. They are different perspectives on the whole. But they are also different from each other.

God-centeredness

God-centeredness, I believe, is very useful in describing the relationship between God and his creation. God-centeredness is well illustrated by the simple Van Tillian diagram found in Figure 1.

God created everything that exists out of nothing and all of creation is a reflection of him, is distinct from him, and is dependent on him.^[1]

This view of God-centeredness is contrasted with the unbiblical one, in which “All is One.” This is illustrated in Figure 2.

On this view, if there is a God, he is in the same boat with the rest of us. He may be bigger and stronger, but he is dependent on what is outside of him just as much as we are dependent on him.^[2] Even if God is placed in the “center” of all things, as illustrated in Figure 2, this view is unbiblical.^[3]

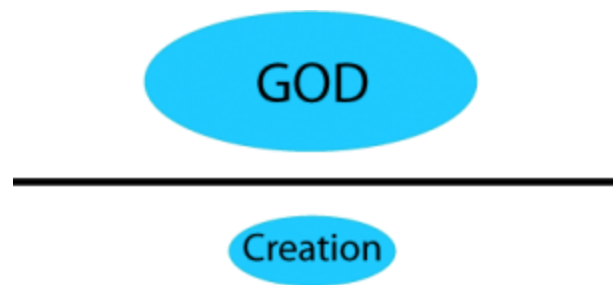


Figure 1. Biblical God-centeredness



Figure 2. The Unbiblical “All is One”

Christ-centeredness

Biblical God-centeredness implies Christ-centeredness, because Christ is at the center of God’s plan for history and beyond.^[4] While God-centeredness highlights the relationship between God and his creation, Christ-centeredness is more focused on the relationship between the very good creation and the glorious eschaton, which is God’s ultimate plan for creation. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

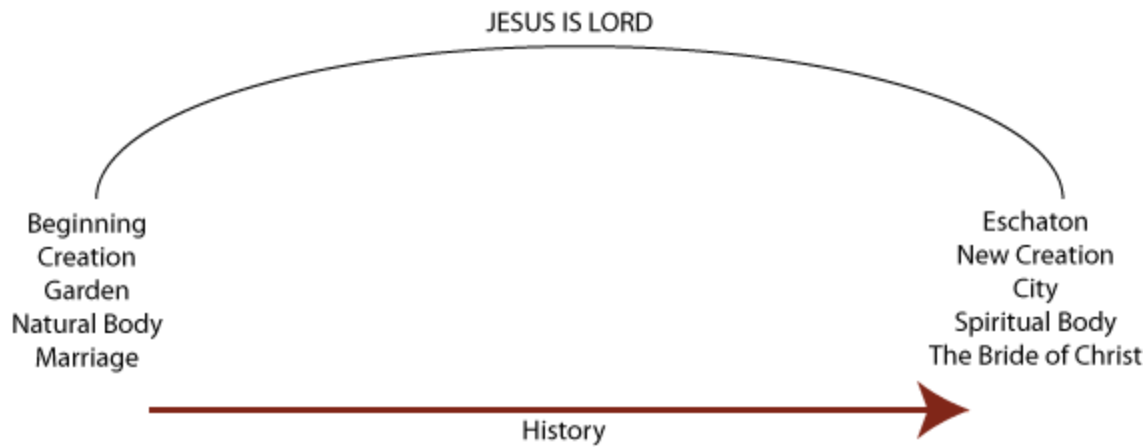


Figure 3. Jesus is Lord of God's Plan for His Creation

The Bible begins with creation and ends with a new creation^[5] It begins with a garden and ends with a beautiful city that incorporates the garden within it. In the beginning mankind was given a natural body, while in the end they are given a spiritual body ^[6] It begins with the institution of marriage, and ends with the marriage of Christ and his bride. ^[7] Christ is at the center of God's plan to bring about the transition from beginning to end. Because of the Fall into sin, this transition sends the Christ by way of the cross.

Because Christ-centeredness is about getting from the very good beginning—marred by the fall—to the glorious end, it is contrasted in Scripture with idolatry. For example, the book of 1 John is about Jesus, the Word of Life (1:1-4). The book ends, somewhat surprisingly, with this statement: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (5:21). The ending of the book is not at all surprising, however, when we remember that idols are pseudo Christs. They pretend to offer the transition to glory that only Christ can provide.

Grace-centeredness

Because of the Fall into sin, the path to the glorious ending must go through the cross. Salvation from sin requires the death of Christ, as well as his triumphant resurrection. Only then can the promised eschatological ^[8] Spirit be poured out. Grace-centeredness refers to how people receive and grow in God's salvation in Christ through the Spirit. Salvation is only by God's grace through faith in Christ, and cannot be accomplished through human effort. It is the Spirit who applies what Christ has accomplished to the lives of believers.

Conclusion

These three—God-centered, Christ-centered and grace-centered in the Spirit—are implied in and require each other, and they are not exactly the same thing. Together they form parameters for a Christian worldview. Figure 4 shows ^[9] how they are different yet related aspects of the message of God's Word.

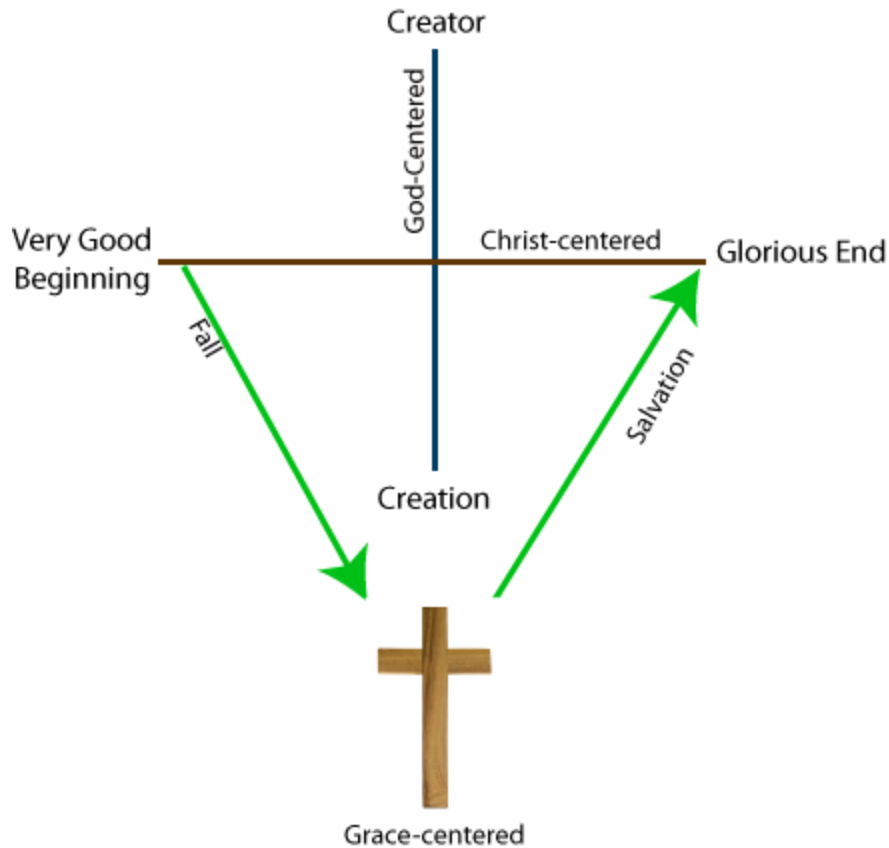


Figure 4. God-centered, Christ-centered and Grace-centered

There is a tendency in my circles to reduce everything to “grace-centeredness.” Of course, if you view it correctly, grace-centeredness implies God-centeredness and Christ-centeredness. In other words, Theology (Doctrine of God), Christology, Eschatology and Soteriology are all important. But they are not the same and can’t all be reduced to Soteriology. I believe, however, that the eschatological work of Christ has been overshadowed by his soteriological^[10] work. I also believe that God-centeredness is being swallowed up by the growing cultural view that “All is one.”^[11]

Endnotes (↵ returns to text)

1. Perhaps the word “God-centered” isn’t the best word to describe this reality, but if interpreted correctly, I think “God-centered” is a useful word.↵
2. The Yin-Yang symbol is a popular example of this mentality.↵
3. Recently Peter Jones has elaborated on this theme that I first heard from Van Til back in the 1970’s. See Jones’ book *One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference* (Main Entry Editions, 2010).↵
4. Ephesians 1:9-10.↵
5. Revelation 21:1.↵
6. 1 Corinthians 15:42-49. I take this to mean a “Spirit-controlled body,” not an immaterial body.↵
7. Revelation 19:7.↵
8. This word refers to the glorious end.↵

9. very imperfectly.␣
10. “Soteriological” has to do with salvation. Many people consider that soteriology—salvation—is practical, whereas theology, Christology, and Eschatology are theoretical and impractical. But people tend to view as practical that which they put to use.␣
11. See Peter Jone’s argument to this effect in his book *One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference* (Main Entry Editions, 2010)␣