

Preaching Christ-centered Application (Sanctification)

Key Question: What difference does it make to reveal the redemptive nature of all Scripture? It changes the goal, themes and *application* of the sermon.

I. The Highest Goal of Preaching

Most preachers examine the text with the sole aim of teaching people *what to do* (duty) or *what to know* (doctrine). But there is a higher goal: teaching people *who they are* in Christ. The ultimate goal of a sermon is not simply proclaiming more duty or doctrine but promoting a more dear relationship with God – love. If the chief end is not so much about performance and competence but glorifying and enjoying God (a relationship), then how does that change what you look for in the text, and what you proclaim from God’s Word? You will look for how the text tells of God’s grace to promote love for him.

II. The Dominant Themes of Redemptive (i.e., Christ-Centered) Messages

Not *sola bootstrapsa* or the "deadly B's," but ...

- A. **Grace** _____ **our Sin** (Assurance and Adoption)
 Typical topics: Our comfort in God's Love (Sabbath)
 Our confidence of God's Love (Sonship: never loved more or less)
- B. **Grace Destroying the** _____ **of Sin** (Justification and Forgiveness)
 Typical topics: Our Repentance, God's Cleansing and Pardon,
 Christ’s Atonement and Imputed Righteousness
- C. **Grace Defeating the** _____ **of Sin** (Sanctification and Enablement)
 Typical topics: Victory over the world, flesh and devil
 Provision of the H.S. and the Word enabling victory
- D. **Grace Compelling** _____ (Worship and Obedience)
 Typical Topics: Thanksgiving, praise, gratitude
 Loving Service

◁> It is this last topic (i.e., loving service) that is often the telltale sign of Christ-centered Preaching. People worry that emphasizing grace undermines obedience. Consistently preaching the necessity and proper _____ for holiness may be the most difficult task evangelical preachers face because we culturally define grace as license rather than as the biblical _____ of holiness. How do we preach grace and still apply the standards of Scripture?

◁> Recognize that it is not gracious to neglect the law that reflects God’s character and is the path of safety and blessing he provides for his people in a fallen world.

III. The Nature of Application in Redemptive (i.e., Christ-Centered) Messages

We have previously understood application to require the answering of four questions: 1) What to do? 2) Where to do it? 3) Why to do it (motivation)? 4) How to do it (enablement)? Traditional preaching takes seriously questions one and two; Christ-centered preaching takes as seriously – and equips us to handle – questions three and four (motivation and enablement).

A. Motivation for Application in Christ-centered Preaching

How Does the Bible Motivate Us to be Holy? (i.e., Your theology of change?)

What makes redeemed people more holy, threat of condemnation or promise of grace? It is not a new question as a review of Rom. 6:1 will assure you. Yet the question is debated in every generation of believers.

[Example of Bunyan in prison]

1. The relationship between Compulsion and Conduct

Reason asks, “Why should people be holy if all you do is keep assuring them of grace?” Scripture answers:

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

II Cor. 5: 14 “The love of God constrains us . . .”

Most people (and preachers) think the goal of preaching is to get people to do what they don’t want to do. Yet, preaching’s highest aim and greatest power lies in convincing others of the love of God in Christ that makes the heart _____ and _____ to do what God desires. When we know that he delights in us, we desire to please him. Conviction of sin is most necessary, but its aim is not simply to make people feel guilty but to enable them to comprehend the greatness of God’s grace. Grace liberates from sin’s guilt and power by filling God’s people with love for him that makes them willing and able to please him (motivation & enablement).

Westminster Confession (XX. 1; XIX. 6, 7)

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and in their being delivered from . . . the dominion of sin . . .; as also, in their free access to God and their yielding obedience to him, not out of a slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.

...(A) man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace.

Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

So we need to ask again, “What better leads to true holiness threats of punishment/condemnation or promise of grace?” (Note well Rom 8:1 “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”)

2. The relationship between our conduct and God's acceptance

Are we holy _____ God's acceptance?

or

Are we holy _____ God's acceptance?

[My Experience: Preaching obedience but not seeing spiritual health.]

3. The relationship between the imperative and the indicative

The _____ rests on the _____ and the order is not reversible. Who we are in Christ is the basis and power for what we do that pleases God (cf. Deut. 5:5). The indicatives: justified, adopted, sanctified (positional-Rom. 12:1; Heb. 10:14), united to Christ, loved – never more and never less.

No less striking in this respect is Colossians 3:3 ff., where in response to 'For you have died and your life is hid in God,' the command at once resounds: "Put to death therefore your members that are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, ' etc. Having once died to Christ does not render superfluous putting to death the members that are upon the earth, but is precisely the great urgent reason for it The imperative is thus founded on the indicative ... it is immediately clear that the imperative rests on the indicative and that this order is not reversible. (H. Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of his Theology*, 1975, p 253)

<> In Christ-centered preaching the _____ do not change, but the _____ do as one preaches with a redemptive approach.

Reiterate: “Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done” (*WCF*, XIX. 7).

<> Our goal in excavating the grace in every passage is not to minimize biblical imperatives but to empower their application with proper motivation and enablement (we are reading *Holiness by Grace* to explore these further).

B. Priorities of Christ-centered Motivation for Application (note order)

1. Love for God

Revealing grace in all the Scriptures is more than an interpretative scheme; it is the chief expository means by which the preacher may provide consistent _____ of the mercy of God in Christ in order to prompt our love for God that is the most powerful motivation for

Christian obedience. Biblical theology should be more about fostering a _____ than promoting/arguing a “science.”

Rom. 12: 1 “I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Consistent focus on Christ’s mercy, rather than building up a dread of God, most powerfully motivates and enables Christians in their fight against sin and desire to glorify God.

Titus 2: 11 ff. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope --the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach.

The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10; *WCF* XX.1).

2. Love for others _____ by God (leads to mission, mercy and service)

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

3. Love for self as one _____ by God

- a. Claiming the rights and _____ of our inheritance in Christ
 Grace is bestowed and the relation established by sovereign divine administration. How then are we to construe the conditions of which we have spoken? ...They are simply the reciprocal responses of faith, love and obedience, apart from which the enjoyment of the covenant blessing and of the covenant relation is inconceivable. (John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 1953, rpt. 1988, p. 19).
 - b. Avoidance of the _____ of sin revealed by a _____ God. (If God did not love us, he would not warn us of sin’s consequences. Warnings to believers must be framed in the context of fatherly love.)
 cf. saving discipline (expressed toward us regularly) vs. retributive punishment (inflicted on Christ one for all): We may experience discipline as a result of our sin but, fatherly discipline even when harsh is still an expression of love for a child's welfare (Heb. 12:6).
- ◆ Thus, there are _____ motivations for obedience – e.g., fear of consequences, desire for blessing (i.e., love of self), concern for others (i.e., love of others), and love for God – but since love of God must be the primary motivation in holiness, stimulating such love must be the *primary* and most consistent concern of our preaching in order for our people to have holy power for their obedience. The message of grace is meant to stimulate love for God *and* its compelling power. Biblical Theology enables us to see and expound this grace in all Scripture and, thus, rightly apply the whole counsel of God to our lives.

C. Improper Motivations contrary to the Whole Counsel of God

1. Making _____-promotion or _____-protection the primary motivations of obedience (cf. Rom. 15:1-3; Col. 3:16).

Self-promotion = God as “vending machine in the sky” plugged by our good works (contra. Is. 54:6).

Self protection = God as “ogre in the sky” placated by our good works (contra. Luke 17:10).

J.I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, p. 75.

The secular world never understands Christian motivation. Faced with the question of what makes Christians tick, unbelievers maintain that Christianity is practiced only out of self-serving purposes. They see Christians as fearing the consequences of not being Christians (religion as fire insurance), or feeling the need of help and support to achieve their goals (religion as crutch), or wishing to sustain a social identity (religions as a badge of respectability). No doubt all of these motivations can be found among the membership of churches: it would be futile to dispute that. But just as a horse brought into a house is not thereby made human, so a self-seeking motivation brought into the church is not thereby made Christian, nor will holiness ever be the right name for religious routines thus motivated. From the plan of salvation I learn that the true driving force for authentic Christian living is, and ever must be, not the hope of gain, but the heart of gratitude.

Heidelberg Catechism Question #86

Question: Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?

Answer: ... [S]o that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:16).

2. Using “slavish” (selfish) fear rather than godly fear as motivation

Not: personal protection from the “ogre in the sky” (contra., “Perfect love drives out fear” - 1 Jn. 4:18; and, he came “to enable us to serve him without fear”- Luke 1:74).

But: proper regard for all God’s attributes = awe and love (cf. Is. 11:2)
{Doctor to child: “I may hurt you, but I’ll not harm you.”}

3. Failing to distinguish objective guilt from subjective guilt as motivation

+subjective guilt = what we feel in grieving the Holy Spirit (conviction)

vs.

+objective guilt = the penalty for past, present and future sin placed on Christ and fully reconciled on the Cross (condemnation)

V. Proper Enablement in Christ-centered Preaching: Answering the How Question

A. The what is the how (we are enabled by knowledge of what is true)

- Knowledge of imperatives. Instructions made known through the explanation of the text, enable us to obey its imperatives.
- Knowledge of our nature (Posse non peccare).
- Confidence in Word and Spirit (The walk of faith-1Jn. 4:4 "Greater is he...")

B. The why is the how (we are enabled by love of God)

1. Love is power

We answer the why question because, when people truly grasp the love of God, they have his strength. The reason that sin has power over us is that we love it. If sin has no attraction to us, then it has no power over us. *How* we undermine the power of sin is by filling the heart with love for Christ; i.e., revealing the grace that is *why* we love him. “The way that you remove the power of anything is by taking away its life source; the life source of sin is our love for it. Take that away and sin has no power” (John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, paraphrase).

The way that we diminish love for sin is by displacing it with love for God stimulated by greater understanding of his grace through Christ (e.g., Thomas Chalmer’s, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.”)

2. The Power of the Disciplines (to grow in love, not earn it)

- a. To gain knowledge of God’s expectations, provision and nature.

Law Spirit Redeeming

- b. To walk in the faith of our new affections, position and nature.

Love Sonship New Creature

In contrast to bargaining (the earning theory), balancing (the leverage theory) or topping off (the “fill ‘er up” theory) by which disciplines are used to placate or satisfy God through works of sacrificial devotion.

Charles Spurgeon, *Morning*, June, 28 reading

[T]he Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing, but that "Christ is all in all." Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee--it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee--it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument--it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ....

We shall never find happiness by looking at our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is, not what we are, that gives rest to the soul. If we would at once overcome Satan and have peace with God, it must be by "looking unto Jesus."

Keep thine eye simply on Him; let His death, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon thy mind; when thou wakest in the morning look to Him; when thou liest down at night look to Him.

Conclusion:

Preach God's provision of grace as the _____ and _____ behind every instruction.

Bottom line of Christ-centered Preaching: Take people away from themselves as the instrument of healing, and teach them from all the Scriptures of the hope they have through God’s grace in Christ that will engender the love that is their power.