

## **Preaching Christ-Centered Application (Sanctification)**

Before we get into this material of Lecture 3, let's do a quick review. What I tried to say so far in the previous lecture is this: God is always revealing his gracious character in Scripture in some way, shape, or form. He is showing his people his gracious character so that when Christ appears we understand who he is and what he's done. God is always the hero, he provides, and this becomes most fully manifest in Christ, and we recognize and understand him because of previously revealed grace principles. And we've talked about ways to discern those grace principles in various aspects of Scripture. We've said that the path to see those grace principles can either be a macro understanding or a micro understanding. In the macro understanding, what we're doing is we're saying, "How does this text either prepare us for the person and work of Christ or predict the person and work of Christ?"; or maybe we're looking and saying, "How does this passage reflect the person and work of Christ?" And there are various ways we talked about that. Remember? It can either be by answering the question, "What does this text reveal about God, who provides redemption?" or "What does this text reveal about man, who requires redemption?" So whether or not you're dealing with the macro or you're dealing with the micro—in macro revelation we're not looking at broad sweeps from Genesis to Revelation, but in micro revelation we're saying, "All right, how are grace principles being revealed right here? How is God providing strength for the weak, food for the hungry? What right here is revealing God's gracious character either in relational interaction or doctrinal statement?"

Now, as we're saying that there are these grace principles being revealed in all of Scripture, we have to say why are we even bothering to do all this? And that relates with what we're talking about today: preaching Christ-centered application. How does all this understanding of the nature of grace and all of Scripture affect sanctification, particularly as we're preaching it? Here's the key question: what difference does it make to reveal the redemptive nature of all Scripture? And what I am going to contend is that seeing this grace in all Scripture changes the goal, the themes, and ultimately the application of the sermon. Now, the thing I want to tell you is, at least I think, is the highest goal of preaching and why we are trying to excavate the grace from all of Scripture. And before I get into some of the specifics here I just want to say candidly to you I will understand if what I now say is a struggle for you. I think it has taken me half a lifetime to sense the implications of what it means for the grace of God to be being revealed in all Scripture and how that changes the nature of Scripture. And it's not the way I was trained, not the way I was taught to think, and I'll understand if you feel some tension with what I'm saying. I must tell you even as I teach it to you, even as I try to preach these things, I sense that I am just touching the edge of the reality of what I want to say. But here we go.

If you say, "What is the highest goal of preaching?" I think most preachers examine the text with the sole aim of teaching people either what to do or what to know. That is they look at the text and they think of either the duty or the doctrine. That's what I'm trying to show you—either duty or doctrine that's here in the text. But I'm going to contend that there is a higher goal. It's not teaching people only what to *do* or what to *know*, but rather

teaching people *who they are in Christ*. The ultimate goal of the sermon is not simply proclaiming more duty or doctrine, but promoting a more dear relationship with God. That is really talking about God's love. If the chief end of the sermon is not so much about performance and competence but glorifying and enjoying God—what we say in the Catechism—then we recognize the chief end is not so much about duty and doctrine but it's rather about a relationship. Now how does that change what you look for in the text and what you proclaim from God's Word? What you'll do is you'll begin to look for how the text tells of God's grace to promote love for him. Maybe we'll say even more specifically, the goal of the sermon is to convince people, to have them believe profoundly, that God loves them despite their weakness and sin and frailty, and knowing that, what happens then is they love him. Is that really the goal of the text? To teach people that despite their sin and frailty and weakness the God of heaven loves them.

Think of how Paul says it in Romans 15:4. He says this, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." That's a different goal than just duty and doctrine. If you say everything that's written, everything that's there is written to encourage us, to give us endurance so that we might have hope; if that's the goal, to teach the people profoundly of the love of God for them so that they have hope in their fallen condition. Roman numeral II relates to the dominant themes of redemptive, that is, Christ-centered, messages, if they have behind them this understanding that we're speaking about the love of God for his people and having people profoundly understand that. Obviously a dominant theme of redemptive messages then is not "sola bootstraps" or "deadly be's" messages—you know, messages about just straighten up and fly right, and God will love you for that. Instead, a consistent message of Christ-centered preaching is one like this: Item A: Grace despite your sin. These are messages of assurance—God loves us because of his grace not our performance; messages of adoption—that our relationship with God is based upon his love for us, adopting us, not our somehow making him our God. It's his work in our behalf. And if you think about how messages of assurance and adoption begin to affect all the topics of preaching, then you can think of things like this: What typical topics come out of assurance and adoption? God's grace despite our sin. It can be something like, "Our comfort in God's love." Now how does that change things? How does that affect things?

When you take a subject like the Sabbath. Now I must tell you whether I was growing up in the church or whether I was a preacher, my greatest concern about the Sabbath was what people either should or should not do on the Sabbath. Now that's still a concern. But I think I often missed what was the point of the Sabbath. You remember that when the Earth was Eden, when man did not live by the sweat of his brow, by his work, that everything was Sabbath. It was a Sabbath day, it was a Sabbath time. And then when he fell, what his sin meant is that he would have to by his own labors, by his own striving, he would have to make his way in the world. But ultimately God would say to his people, "I will give you, along with the commands for your serving and your working, a day of rest. If you will rest in me I can do more in six days for you than you can do in seven days for you. Rest in me."

Now, we have to recognize that command for rest came out of the worst of their labors. They were out of slavery, that they were out of having to make more bricks with less straw, it was out of their labor that they had to make them, and God said, "I will give you rest." Now we know of course that they did not altogether honor that, ultimately when they were released from the Exodus, you remember they were going through the land of Canaan and as they are going from their slave labor to Canaan, God says to you, "You are entering the land of my rest. From your labor to my rest. You are entering the Promised Land." It's the land of Sabbath. And when they failed to honor God in that land of Sabbath and they went to the exile, God said, "I will bring you back to my Sabbath. Again from your slavery back into my rest." So when we get to Hebrews 4, after the people of God still do not understand, they are still thriving and wrestling by their work to make things right with God, the writer of Hebrews says, "Because of the work of Jesus Christ there remains a Sabbath. Not by your work but by the work of Jesus Christ you can again enter my rest." And the book of Isaiah reminds us that at the culmination of all things, when we have been through this veil of tears, when we have labored all of our lives to accomplish, when God finally comes to redeem the world, he says we will enter our final Sabbath.

Our obedience to the Sabbath is ultimately a recognition of God's provision of rest. It's not just trying to get people to do enough so that God will honor them. It's actually getting people to rest in the goodness that's of God. And that's the goal. It may still be about obedience to God but it has a different aim, it has a different way in which it's approaching people and saying what is God wanting to communicate to you of his assurance and of your position in him? Of course you will talk about the comfort of God, all the message of sonship, of our adoption, that God will not love you more because you're better; and the flipside of that, he won't love you less because you're worse. I will tell you that people just can't believe that that's true. God won't love me less when I mess up? He doesn't. You're his child. My child may disappoint me, he may displease me, he may receive disciple from me, but he is still my child and nothing changes that. I will have his best interest always in my heart. And God says, "There is grace despite your sin because of my assurance given through many means and because you're my child."

Messages that will be typical of these redemptive messages are also "Grace destroying the guilt of sin." Messages of justification and forgiveness, typical topics: Our repentance, God's cleansing, our need of pardon and how we get it. Christ's atonement, the necessity of imputed righteousness that God has given us, the wonderful glory of recognizing that everything that's true of Christ by our union with him is applied to us. I'm as holy as Jesus before God. Remember Bunyan's wonderful illustration? It's as though every Christian possesses a magic mirror and on one side I see the reflection which is my own scars and warts and blemishes—I see me for who I am. But on the back side of the mirror is the image of Jesus and God chooses to look at me through that side of the mirror. I have his righteousness; it's mine by the work of my great God.

I will preach messages of grace defeating the power of sin. It's not just that I am pardoned, I am freed. I am freed from the guilt and power of sin. Messages of sanctification and enablement. Typical topics will be the victory that we have over the world, the flesh, and the devil. I'm not hopeless, I am not helpless. Satan says you cannot stop it and I say that's a lie. Greater is he that's in you than he that's in the world. God has worked to give me power and knowing that power is part of my strength. The provision of the Holy Spirit and his Word that enable victory give me hope, and that's part of my strength.

Another constant theme will be grace compelling holiness, that our worship and obedience are ultimately a response to his grace and enabled ultimately by his grace. Typical topics will be those of thanksgiving and praise and gratitude, an ultimately loving service. The reason that I serve God is the reason Jesus said. He said, "If you love me you will keep my commands." He didn't say, "Keep my commands so that I will love you." He said if you really love me, this is going to be kind of the turtle falling off the log, it will just happen; if you love me you will keep my commands because you will delight to please me and you will delight to walk with me, and I've given you the path that I walk on.

It's that last topic, loving service, that we're preaching—service to God out of love for him—that's often the tell-tale sign of Christ-centered preaching, because people worry that emphasizing grace undermines obedience. Consistently preaching the necessity and the proper motivation for holiness may be—I think it is—the most difficult task that evangelical preachers face because we culturally define grace as license, rather than as the biblical power—we can even say the biblical compulsion—of holiness. I mean, the world says grace means I get to do what I want. The Bible says you would love to do what God wants. You will respond in a way that the love of God will now constrain you and grace is building that dynamic into our hearts. We talk...how do we preach grace and still apply the standards of Scripture, particularly if the world and many Christians view those as antithetical? Grace is antithetical to obedience. How do we preach it so that grace is actually the power of obedience? First, I think we just have to have this recognition: 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. I think we just have to start by saying the Law rightly applied is not antithetical to grace. Don't let the world do that to us. The Law is the safe path, the good path, what God intended to be a blessing to his people. Now, going on that path and staying on that path is motivated by grace. Grace is not antithetical to it. In essence what I'm saying by that little phrase there, we still have to do application, we still have to do it. Sometimes people say you can't have any "shoulds" in Christ-centered preaching. No, you must! It's actually ungracious to not tell people what God has given for their good and for their safe-keeping.

So let's talk about the nature of application in redemptive, that is, Christ-centered preaching. We previously understood application (I'm going to go to the board here) to be answering four questions, right? What to do? Where to do it? So this was instructional

specificity out of the text, situational specificity out of our circumstances, but then we've also said there were two more questions: Why and how? Motivation and enablement. If you will, here's where we're focusing now, all right? We are saying if application is still on the page, if we still have to do it for faithful preaching, then we've got to make sure we know what the motivation is and how people can do what we have told them to do. And in essence, it's not throwing away the Law, it's not throwing away application that is making Christ-centered preaching; it's actually giving the right motivation and enablement for it. Just to finish that paragraph on your notes: Traditional preaching takes seriously questions 1 and 2. Christ-centered preaching takes as seriously and hopefully equips us to handle questions 3 and 4, the ones of motivation and enablement.

As you think about the question of motivation, Item A for Application in Christ-centered Preaching, just start with the question: How does the Bible motivate us to be holy? Another way of asking is this: What's your theology of change? How is the Bible changing people, how is it motivating us? My question has to be even more specific. What makes redeemed people more holy? Threat of condemnation or promise of grace? And that's not a new question, as a quick review of Romans 6 will say, right? Should we continue in sin that grace may abound? Hey, hey, it's all grace, sin city here I come! Should we just continue in sin that grace may abound? People are concerned if you talk too much grace you will promote unholiness. So if that's the question always debated how do we answer it?

Well let me just begin with an old illustration. This is again of Bunyan, the writer of *Pilgrim's Progress*. You may remember that Bunyan got a lot of the writing and the ideas while he was in prison. Remember? He was one of the non-establishment preachers. He did not want the authority of the king to be ruling over his choice of what he said and the position he had so he was put in prison. Now he wasn't the only one put in prison. The Anabaptists also rejected the rule of the royal authority and so they were also put in prison. So here you have Bunyan, this Calvinistic Baptist, and you have Anabaptists in prison together facing death as far as they knew every day, so of course what did they do? They debated theology. And the Anabaptists would say to Bunyan, "You cannot keep assuring people of God's love, you cannot do that. If you keep assuring people of God's love they'll do whatever they want." Bunyan's famous answer: "No. If you keep assuring God's people of God's love, they will do whatever he wants." Listen, let's just acknowledge it. Can grace be abused? Of course. But for those in whom the Spirit dwells, for the heart that is not in rebellion, grace is the fuel of obedience. I love him so I want now to honor him. They will do whatever he wants if they really love him and are assured of his love for them.

We need to think of the relationship between compulsion and conduct. Reason, good reason asks, "Why should people be holy if all you keep on doing is assuring them of grace?" Scripture answers that question at a very heart human level. Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey what I command." That's why they'll do it, because it will create love. Or even take the ministry that we have. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, "The love of God constrains us to preach the gospel." It's understanding what he is for us that ultimately is

the compulsion. Most people, even preachers, think it's getting 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 willing and able. Hear that? Willing and able. What can I do that will make you willing and able to do what God desires? When we know that God delights in us we desire to please him. Conviction of sin is most necessary, we still have to do that, convict of sin, but its aim is not simply to make people feel guilty, but to enable them to comprehend the greatness of God's grace. You feel so bad but look at how great is the grace that rescues you! 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. That is providing both motivation and enablement.

Look at how the Westminster Confession states it in the chapter on Christian liberty. It's down at the bottom of the page there. "The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists: [this is interesting, we're all free from this] the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law, and in there being delivered from the dominion of sin." See that? Free from the guilt and power of sin. "So also in their free access to God and in their yielding obedience to him not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and willing mind."

And you say, "All right I want people to obey God. Is what I'm bringing into the message that's ultimately compelling them creating a childlike love for God and a willing mind, or am I actually utilizing the tools that they are free of—the condemning wrath of God, further guilt, convincing them they are under a power they really aren't under? Are my tools, the mechanisms I am using for application, for the motivation of it, those which create a childlike love and willing mind?" Look at the last paragraph. "Neither are the aforementioned uses of the Law contrary to the grace of the Gospel." OK, the Law has been explained and its implications and requirement, it's not contrary to the grace of the gospel. "But those do sweetly comply with it the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling." Hear that again? The Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that. Now listen to these terms: "freely and cheerfully." Is what I'm doing enabling people to cheerfully obey God, which the will of God, revealed in the Law, requires to be done?

Now these are high requirements for preaching that are now coming out of the Confession, right? We have to have encouragement to obedience that is free of slavish fear. It's motivated by childlike love. Is my application in the message? Yes, it's there. Are people wanting to do it because of childlike love for God? Have I got that into the message? Have I so told them that they are enabled by the Spirit that they will now cheerfully obey him? Did I do that? Did I get that part of the message in? It's really scary when you think about it. I'm supposed to be creating these dynamics as part of the preaching so that I'm not shackling people with what they are free of. How do I do that? How will our preaching accomplish these things? Next page says this: We need to ask again, what better leads to true holiness? Threats of punishment or condemnation or promise of grace? Particularly since we know the Bible says, Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ." Well, I can't condemn them, what power do I have over them?

We need to think about the relationship between our conduct and God's acceptance. Ultimately the question is boiling down to this: Are we holy for God's acceptance, or are we holy from God's acceptance? The first of course is conditional love based upon fear of rejection or punishment—I'm holy for God's acceptance. The second, holy from God's acceptance, is unconditional love based on his perseverance not our performance. I'm holy from his persevering love. That's what I'm responding to, not my performance that's gaining his love.

Now, I always fear a little bit when I'm at this point that I can't say with the earnestness that I want to say things the way I want to say without some way scaring you. I just recognize my own experience. I went from this place and when I graduated from this place with my graduating class our motto as it was at that time was that we would live for the glory of God. It sounds pretty good. But what it really meant was I'll do better than the next guy. And I watched so many of my peers crash and burn within just a few years of ministry because it wasn't just that they were trying to do better than the next guy, they were telling their congregations to do better than the next guy, and I was too. You know people were telling me, "You're such a good preacher," and I thought to myself, "If I'm such a good preacher why are my people doing so bad?"

I went to minister about an hour and fifteen minutes from here at a rural church, and it was the largest church in our presbytery, great stuff. We were eaten up with immorality, with all sorts of substance abuse, with family abuse, with depression, and I thought, "If I'm such a good preacher, why is this going on?" I tell you because people would commend me for my preaching. I don't think I heard my errors ever in my preaching. It was more in my counseling I began to actually hear what I was saying to people. I would deal with a couple who was fractious, maybe coming apart, and I would say to them words like this: "Now listen, if you expect God to love you, you got to straighten up." You hear what I just said? If you expect God to love you, you've got to fix this. And I think despite myself, oh, I could have gotten the right answers on any exams that anyone would give me, but if you kind of examined what was in my heart, in my preaching, I thought I had to force people by fear, by intimidation, by banging on them with the Bible week after week. I had to make them obey God, and in my own heart I thought the reason why they are suffering so much is because they are disobedient. Now there's an element of truth in all of that but I ultimately recognized it wasn't just they who were living conditionally, I was. I believed God would bless or care for me based on how well I did, and that's why I preached that way, it was coming out of my own heart. I mean there was that time I went to my wife and said, "I can't do this any more. You know, I just can't do this any more. I did not go in to the ministry to hurt people. And yet that's all I can see that I'm doing." Why are they in depression? Because I'm teaching them God won't love them till they get better. Why are they in addictions? Because of me, because of preachers like me! Of course they are running from me, of course they want to dull the ache of this world, of course they do! I haven't given them a God who'll help them; I've given them a God who's waiting for them to get better. And it was killing me.

The thing that rescued me, you'll feel strange about this I know, because you read the work. It was Sidney Greidanus, it was reading that awful thing that I had you read of *Sola Scriptura* where he talked about the biblical exemplars and you know, you think how in the world did that help? Because I began to see what I'm telling people is to be like Moses, just do better, just be better, and I didn't know why those biblical characters were there, that God was the hero, they weren't the hero. And it began to just open a world for me I did not know. I would have gotten a good grade on the test. It wasn't what I lived this early in my heart; I was living conditionally, I was teaching them to do the same.

Ultimately what God began to do for me was change me with some of these truths I want you to know. One of these is so simple—it's number 3 on page 3: the relationships between the imperative and the indicative. You know these words from Ridderbos, the imperative rests on the indicative and the order is not reversible. Everybody puts the cart before the horse, right? I'll obey God, then he'll love me. I'll do enough and then he'll accept me. And yet of course we go even to the Decalogue where God says, "Listen, I'm the God who rescued you, that's why you obey me. I didn't say obey me and then I'll rescue you." The imperatives were founded on the indicatives and the order was not reversible. I put the quote of Ridderbos, the famous one, a little bit lower on the page there in the small print. He's talking about Colossians 3 and he says this: "No less striking in this respect [of the imperative resting on the indicative] is Colossians 3:3 where in response to, 'For you have died and your life is hid in God' the command at once resounds. . . ." Now listen, the first is the indicative, right? You're dead! But you're hid with Christ in God. Now there are imperatives that follow. "Put to death, therefore, your members which 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." If you capture just that it will change absolutely everything, not just in the way you preach, it will change everything in the way you relate to people. The imperative rests on the indicative and the order is not reversible.

When my wife and I kind of just got a glimpse of these grace truths in ministry, we put ourselves under a discipline of change even the way we talked to our children. I mean I may strike you as silly but we had to do it for our own hearts' sake. I would say to my oldest son for instance, "Collin, you are a bad boy because you did that." You hear what I just did? I based who he was on what he did. You are bad because you did bad. In that case I was saying the indicative is based on the imperative. You did not obey, therefore you are a bad person. It may sound silly but I would say to Collin later as I understood more of these things, "Collin don't do that! You're my son! I want you to know who you are, I want you to recognize you are my son. That's the relationship that's motivating you and I want you to know that relationship as the motivation for what you are doing or being called to do." It will change the way you talk to your wife. I mean I think I'm a typical American male—if I've got tension with my wife, what do I do? I either get mad or I get real quiet. I begin to treat her according to her actions. I'll treat you the way you treated me or the way I think you treated me. I should be treating her according to our

covenant relationship. It doesn't mean we don't have things to work through. We've got things to work through but I treat you according to our relationship. I'm concerned for our good, for our faithful lives together. I'm going to treat you according to our relationship not according to your actions. Do we have things to work through? Yes. But it's foundational upon the indicative of who we are. I'm not going to say who we are based upon what we do to one another. I'm going to try to act toward you based upon who we are in the covenant that God has sealed for us. It will change everything. It will change the way you talk to fellow believers who have made you mad. It will change the way you think about the church. Is the imperative based on the indicative? If it is it will change absolutely everything about the way you think about others, the way you talk about them, the way you talk to them and the way you preach.

In Christ-centered preaching what it means, just to fill in your notes here, in Christ-centered preaching what this means is the rules do not change. The rules do not change. It is now not OK to steal. The rules do not change but the reasons do. As one preaches with a redemptive approach, as we say over and over again, I'm not saying that you should be holy for God's acceptance. I'm still saying you should be holy. Rules don't change. But the reasons change—this is FROM God's acceptance that I urge you, it's in view of God's mercy that I urge you to offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. It's in view not to gain that mercy. Just to reiterate the Confession here as it speaks of it: "Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of God subduing and enabling the will of men to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God revealed in the law requires to be done." 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. I mean, when you read *Holiness by Grace* later this semester, that's all I'm asking you to look for—motivation, enablement, how is God doing that for all of our lives.

The priorities, as it were, of Christ-centered motivations, we think about them, what motivations actually are right to use and how do I use them. The first one has to be love for God. The first and primary motivation for Christ-centered preaching is love for God; that is, revealing the grace in all of Scripture is more than an interpretive scheme. It's the chief expository means by which the preacher may provide consistent adulation—adulation of the mercy of God in Christ in order to prompt our love for God that is the most powerful motivation for Christian obedience. On the next page it says this, "Biblical theology should be more about fostering a relationship than promoting or arguing a science." Now let me tell you why that's there. When John Sanderson was here, when Ed Clowney was at Westminster Seminary, they were professors who a generation ago were trying to teach biblical theology, and they will tell you that they were voices in the wilderness—they felt nobody heard them. And one of the reasons that it was hard for them to be heard was what biblical theology had gone through in the preceding generation and some generations before. This notion of the grace in all the Scriptures is not new. This notion of the exemplars having the purpose of revealing the redemptive work of God is not new. If you say where was it most discussed, it was in the Dutch church a hundred years ago. But it became an argument, it became a science of

hermeneutics where we began to argue: all right, who's got the best master metaphor of how grace is being revealed? Is it kingdom? Is it land? Is it adoption? What is the master metaphor? And so you get all these debates about who has the better science for interpreting the master metaphor of grace in the Scriptures. And what got lost in the process? Relationship. It was about discerning God's love for his people despite their weakness.

I sometimes recognize that as people go out from here—even people who go out from here—it just becomes, you know, this person against that person, this science against that one. I really don't care if you think this method of finding grace is better than that method. I really don't care. My zeal is that you discover what God is trying to do is stimulate in his people love for him through Christ. Because I just foundationally believe, if people love him, if they love him, they will walk with him. And all I'm trying to do is find ways that you can look at the Scriptures and see how God is building that love for himself to revealing his ministry through Christ.

It's what he said, right? Romans 12:1 as Paul summarizes all that he had said doctrinally of all the Scriptures have led to at that point: "I urge you 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." Hear the holiness required? I'll still tell you I read this verse wrong most of my life. Here's the way I read it: I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, and then you will be holy and pleasing to God. Is that what it says? You be a good living sacrifice and then you'll be holy and pleasing to God. The word holy should have been a clue, shouldn't it? Are you ever going to be holy before God? This is not a statement of what you *will be*; it's a declaration of what you *are*. You offer your bodies as living sacrifices which are by the mercy of God holy and pleasing to God. When you recognize that, that's the transformed mind—that you are not made right by what you do, you are made right because God in his mercy has provided for you. You are holy and pleasing to God—live that way! That's your spiritual act of worship: living out the reality of what he has already done for you. 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 their desire to glorify God. If you don't believe that the next verse won't make sense at all. Remember, Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. Oh, I thought grace meant yes to everything I want. No, grace rightly understood says if God wasn't there I don't want to be there. Grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and ultimately it's understanding all that he's done for us that fills us with that hope and that joy that is our strength. The first and primary motivation is simply love for God.

The second is love for others loved by God. This is what leads to mission and acts of mercy and service to the undeserving. I sometimes hear us, even in our circles, people will be kind of moved more toward justice and mercy concerns. People say, "All right, I'll be merciful toward the deserving poor." What about the undeserving poor? What about the ones that will take advantage of you if you try to help them? You see, grace is

for the undeserving and grace is not known if you are waiting to dispense it only to those who are deserving. But why would we do it? Why would we help people who take advantage of us, abuse our mercy, are undeserving? Well, because Jesus loves them. I love Jesus and that means I will love the ones he loves and I will love the mercy that he wants to show. Ultimately the reason you would read a verse like this, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for these brothers of mine you did for me,” is because you understand what Jesus is saying: “As you care for them, you are actually caring for me. It’s not because you love them. Do you love me? I want you to take care of me then and my priorities for even the least of these.” There’s certain power in the moment, I recognize it, and I recognize it will pass. If you do some of the readings that a lot of the evangelicals now who are celebrating the mercy and justice themes, they will remind us very truthfully that the postmodern ear needs to hear you celebrate justice and mercy. I mean people coming into our church need to hear us as pastors celebrate justice and mercy. They won’t always want to hear that. That movement will change and ultimately what will keep us faithful to God’s purposes is saying, “But I will love those that no one else will because it shows the mercy of God. It’s because of the love of Christ that I do this, not because it’s popular in the moment.”

Another motivation is love for self as one loved by God. These are more difficult themes because love of self sounds wrong. But if I say to you, “Wait a second, I’m a child of the king.” So if I think about hurting myself, if I think the great mark of holiness is that I will feel badder longer about some sin that I have done, I’m not recognizing what God has made me. He has made me precious to him. Granted, I may feel subjective guilt for sin that I’ve done, but I have an obligation before God to love the ones he loves—that means I protect the temple of the Holy Spirit. That means I am concerned if what I see are patterns of thought, or work, or relationship that are damaging to me. Part of my obligation to love Jesus is actually to love *me*. And I think you know believers who think that the mark of their holiness is they feel bad about themselves and to recognize actually that is not recognizing the work that Christ has done for them adequately. Is there right conviction of sin? Of course. But there is a healthy love of what God has done for us in Christ. We want to claim the rights and privileges of our inheritance in Christ.

Some of you know this language of Murray. He begins to say how can we talk about grace and still talk about conditions of God’s affection at the same time? He says it this way: “Grace is bestowed and the relationship established by sovereign divine administration. Grace comes by God’s choice. How then are we to construe the conditions in which we are spoken like the curses and the blessings in the Old Testament? They are simply the reciprocal responses of faith, love, and obedience apart from which the enjoyment of the covenant blessings and the covenant relationship is inconceivable.” It’s saying this: your obedience does not make God love you. But what’s the only way you can experience the blessings of the covenant? It’s through obedience. It’s that kind of conditionality. You will not know the blessings of faithfulness to a spouse if you’re not faithful to your spouse. Doesn’t mean God is conditionally saying I will love you more or less. But the blessings of the covenant still hinge upon obedience,

even though the covenant is sovereignly administered. We are acting upon what God has already accomplished in our behalf.

Love of self also means that we will be concerned about avoidance of the consequences of sin revealed by a loving God. If God did not love us, he would not warn us. Did you ever think of that? I mean, there are real warnings in Scripture. There are real warnings of discipline, there are real warnings of wrath, but God warns us because he wants to protect us. Saving discipline even, if you think of it that way, is always in the context of Fatherly love. Saving discipline expressed toward us regularly in the Scriptures is never, however, retributive punishment. How much of the penalty of your sin did Christ take upon the cross? All of it. How much of your past penalty did Christ take on the cross? How much of your present penalty? What's the hard question? How much of the future penalty of your sin did Christ take on the cross? *All of it. Absolutely all of it.* So what is happening now as we experience discipline is never punitive in the sense that God is desiring to hurt us, in the sense that God is saying, "I'll get my pound of flesh, you crossed me like that." It is never that. There is only loving discipline now whose goal is to build up, to restore, to turn back into his purpose, to protect from danger. So if we begin to preach discipline as though it is punishment we actually abandon our theology. 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. It is of course Hebrews 12: "God disciplines those he loves."

Thus there are many motivations for obedience, there are many motivations for obedience—fear of consequences, desire for blessing, love of self that is concerned for others, which is love for others, and of course love for God. But because love of God must be the primary, I almost want you to put it in neon lights. The PRIMARY motivation for 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 simply meant to stimulate love for God, and it's compelling power. Biblical theology is just a tool. It's just a tool that enables us to expound and experience this grace that is found in all Scripture and thus rightly apply the whole counsel of God to their lives.

Now I have to put it against improper motivation so let me do that kind of quickly. What are some improper motivations that are contrary to the whole counsel of God? Number one: Making self-promotion or self-protection the primary motivation of obedience. Now let me be very square with you. It's not just you. Most people in our churches are being motivated out of one of two primary motivations. They will obey God so the ogre in the sky will not get them. Listen to me: If the primary reason that you are obeying God is so the ogre in the sky will not get you, who are you really serving? Yourself. It's just self-protection. There is another reason, primary reason, lots of people obey God. They obey God so they will get more good stuff, either in this life or in the life to come. Bigger mentions up there you know? Listen, if the primary reason that you serve God is so that you'll get more good stuff, who are you really serving? Yourself. It's just sanctified selfishness. You cannot serve God until you come to the profound conviction that your

best works merit you nothing. That the reason that a missionary can go on a mission field out of love for Christ and expect to die, to pack his goods in his coffin, is not because God is going to give him more good stuff but because he loves his Savior more than his own life. And the only thing that will create that kind of love is profound understanding, not of personal merit but of divine mercy. God has been so good, I must tell, I must tell. There is of course self-promotion as some people's motivation which is God is the vending machine in the sky who's plugged by our good works, put another nickel of good works in there; or God is the ogre in the sky who's placated by our good works. People will obey this God; they just won't like him very much.

Packer says it this way in *Rediscovering Holiness*: "The secular world never understands Christian motivation. Faced with the question, 'What makes Christians tick?' unbelievers maintain that Christianity is practiced only out of self-serving purposes. That's what they think—the unbeliever—you're just doing this to serve yourself. They see Christians as fearing the consequences of not being Christians (that is, religion is fire insurance), or feeling the need of help and support to achieve their goals (religion as crutch) or wishing to sustain a social identity (that is, religion as a badge of respectability). Now, that's what non-Christians think that we're doing. Candidly that's what lots of Christians are doing, those very things. 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." Isn't that interesting? You can still pray and do all that, it's not holiness. 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.

The Heidelberg Catechism says what I think is one of the most honest questions of all the confessional catechisms you'll find, just kind of straightforward. This question: "Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why should we do good works?" Isn't that a great question? Hey, if it's all grace, why be good? Why even bother? You know, he's just being gracious. So if it's not based on our good works, why should we be good? See the answer? Why should we be good, do good works? "So that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us." It's a wonderful statement. I'm living out of thanksgiving to my God. Please don't get hung up on the word "gratitude." I know Piper in *Future Grace* is very concerned about that word and if you define it as he does, a debtor ethic, remember that? I'll make it up to God, I'll be good, I'll make it up to God—if that's what your gratitude is it's worthless. But that's not the biblical definition. If you go to Colossians 3:16, which says specifically, "Let the love of God dwell in you richly, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." What kind of attitude is that? It's not debtor response, it's thanksgiving, it's love overflowing. I want to show my love, I want to give thanks to God. It's not payback. If you're trying to give payback you haven't understood grace, you haven't understood its magnitude. You won't pay it back. But if it's true thanksgiving then that's a wonderful motivation and the way the Reformers typically used that language.

Another wrong motivation beyond self-promotion or self-protection is using what the Reformers call slavish fear rather than Godly fear as motivation. Now what's the difference? It's not personal protection from the ogre in the sky, not that kind of fear. Remember the Bible says, "Perfect love drives out fear." That kind of trembling before the ogre, as it were. Even in the nativity account, in Luke 1:74, we're told this, that Jesus came to enable us to serve him without fear. Amazing thought—we're going to serve now without fear. But now you're going to say, "Wait! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Isn't there a right fear?" And the answer is, of course. Proper fear in the Bible—the problem is we don't have a good English word. We need Brian Aucker to be in the classroom; no, I'm just teasing! What's the equivalent English word for Hebrew "fear"? And I don't think we have a good equivalent English word. I mean almost always people say something about awe. I don't even think that captures it entirely. I think fear is proper regard for all of the attributes of God. It includes of course his wrath but at the very same moment it includes proper regard for his love.

You know one of the helpful passages for me has been Isaiah 11 that reminds us that when the Messiah will come he will live in the fear of the Lord. Now whatever you think Jesus' relationship to the Father is, it is not "that ogre in the sky is gonna get me." It's not that kind of fear, it is not slavish fear. It is recognition of the awesome greatness, power, and love of God all at the same moment. It's proper regard for who he is. If it's that kind of fear, than it's recognizing even as I dread his discipline I am drawn to his heart. It's that kind of fear. A little example, maybe you've used it other times too. I think of the mom who took her son to the doctor and he was going to have to get a shot cause he was sick, and so the doctor said to the boy, "Son, I'm going to have to give you a shot." And the mom said, "It's not going to hurt, don't worry, it's not going to hurt." Well the doctor knew it was going to hurt and so he said to the boy, "I may hurt you but I will not harm you." I think God in discipline at times expects us to have fear of hurt. No discipline seems pleasant at the moment, but God says, "I will not harm you. You are my child." I don't fear the harm of God. No more, no more. He is my Father and that kind of fear I am freed from and will never feel it again. I am free from the slavish fear before a God who would hurt me out of harm's intent.

Some of our failure in proper motivation is failing to distinguish objective guilt from subjective guilt as motivation. Subjective guilt certainly we will do in preaching. We will have people feel guilty in grieving the Holy Spirit—what is rightly understood as conviction. People are rightly convicted of sin. I grieved the God who gave himself for me. There is right conviction for sin. But that is different than trying to convince people of objective guilt: Now you are guilty before God and he will hate you because of what you did. No, that is gone. There is therefore now no condemnation. Conviction? Yes. Subjective feeling of guilt? Of course. But not condemnation. I do not stand condemned before God because of my sin because of the grace of God.

Now all of this so far has been about motivation, and I want you to kind of feel—I hope you do—to feel the power of that, that what we're trying to do in our preaching is

excavate grace so that we are stimulating love for Christ, knowing that ultimately that is the power of obedience. And that may sound strange because you say, wait, power? I thought it was the motivation. Ultimately I'll contend it's the power too.

Let's talk about enablement—that's Roman numeral V. What is proper enablement in Christ-centered preaching? That is ultimately answering the "how" question. All right, you told me to do something, but how? How do I do that? At the bottom of page 5 it says, "Remember that the 'what' is the 'how.'" As we began in our preaching to say what to do, what to know, that's part of "how." I mean how we obey God comes from knowing the truth; how we obey God comes from knowing what we're supposed to do. So if we said at least part of enablement is knowledge of imperatives, part of being able to please God we have to tell people the imperatives, they have to have knowledge of the imperatives and so instructions made known through the explanation of the text enable us to obey its imperatives. That's part of obedience. But also the "what" of this: the knowledge of our nature is power. Remember in that theology lesson long ago you learned that you were a new creature. In what way are you a new creature? I don't feel new. Because once you were *non posse non peccare*. Remember that old nature, not able not to sin. What are you now? *Posse non peccare*—you are able because greater is he that is in you than he that's in the world. When the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the nature of your shortcomings he does not say, "and it's hopeless." He says, "I am your helper." I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We are not hopeless now, tomorrow doesn't have to be like yesterday. When I know my real nature I have hope. If I think that I am in an old nature, I just can't help it, it's just the way I'm made, it's probably God's fault. If that's what I really think, I've already failed. I don't have any power now. But if I believe that what the Bible says it's true about my nature that's part of my power. And one of the reasons I'm reading Scripture is God is giving the indicatives: Who are you? Who are you really? If I am more and more drinking in the knowledge of who I am, knowing that's actually part of my strength, what the Bible says about my new nature is part of my strength. It's also ultimately confidence in the Word and Spirit. The Bible is telling me I am not left alone, that I can do all things through Christ, that the Word is informing because I can do and it will give me information so that I can. So knowledge of the Word and Spirit is also why I read the Scriptures, why I am learning the imperatives, why I am seeing what the text says. What I am learning is actually part of the enabling—it's telling me what God requires and who I am. But that's not the end.

As important for me is item B on page 6 at the top—"Remembering the 'why' is the 'how.'" Most of this lecture I've been talking about why we go through the Scriptures and seek to excavate the grace principles that are there, because we are trying to say I want you to love God more, I want you to see how great is his mercy, I want that to be your motivation. But do you recognize that ultimately the "why" is the "how"? When I understand, the great mercy and love fills me up; that's actually my power. Real simple question: What is the only reason that sin has any power in your life? Because you love it; because we love sin more than God. If you didn't love it, it would have absolutely no power. The only reason it attracts you at all is because you love it. Now you may say, "No, no, no. I love Jesus more." I know, but in the moment you loved the sin more than

you loved your Savior. If you loved the Savior more, how much power would sin have over you? It would not.

Look at some of this. Love is—I know it sounds hokey, it’s just so right—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 it has no power over us. How do we undermine the power of sin? We undermine it by filling the heart with love for Christ. That is revealing the grace, that is why we love him. “The way,” —this is John Owen now—“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.” How do we take away the love for sin? We displace it. We displace it with love for Christ. This is Thomas Chalmers’ famous sermon, do you remember? “The expulsive power of a new affection.” Hear that? The expulsive power—he said new affections are pushing out something else; the expulsive power of a new affection. 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.

I’ll go back. It’s not just a hermeneutical method, it’s not just biblical theology, so we’ve got another tool in our tool bag. Ultimately, the reason that we are trying to find God’s redemptive plan, his grace through all the Scriptures, is we’re saying, “Don’t you understand how great is his love for you, how secure you are in him?” So that your reason for obeying God is great love for him. Your primary reason for serving God is love for him, and when love for him is your primary motivation sin has no power.

Now I’m not talking about dispensing with Christian disciplines, I’m not talking about just the practical thing about having accountability partners, all the things that we do to have power over sin. But I’m ultimately driving us to recognize even those disciplines, those accountability partners, what are their duties? Their duties are to be building up a love for Christ. How do most people use Christian disciplines? To barter with God for his blessing. I’ll give you some more of this stuff I hate doing, then you’ll love me; instead of saying, no, the whole goal of the discipline was to drink in, to feast upon the goodness that is God. That’s why you’re doing it. He’s not going to love you more because you read more or longer; that’s not going to do it. All you’re really doing is drinking in more of this that is him.

If you think, there on page 6, of the power of the disciplines, their power is to help us grow love not earn it. Why are we reading, why are we praying? To gain knowledge of God’s expectations. Now that’s why we of course read the Bible, go to church; we learn more about the law, we learn more about God’s provision, his Spirit, but ultimately we’re learning more about his nature. That’s the redeeming work of God that the disciplines are filling me up to know. The other thing I’m doing through the Christian disciplines is learning to walk in the faith of our new affections, which is love for God; our new position of sonship; and our new nature, that is, that we’re creatures. In contrast to what many people are doing with the Christian disciplines, which is bargaining (that’s the earning theory of Christian disciplines); or balancing (the leverage theory—all right, I’m

not perfect, but I've got enough good stuff that I'm gonna balance out the bad, and part of the balancing out the bad is I will go to church this week); or the topping-off theory (listen, I'm not perfect, but God's gonna be gracious to me because he's gonna fill up my imperfections with his grace). By the way, what theory of the atonement is that? That I'm not perfect but I'm better than other people and the way I'm going to get to heaven is God's going to add the grace that I need to "fill her up." Well, you'd be a good Muslim if you believe that. Do Muslims believe in the grace of God? Of course they do! As long as you've been good enough that he can top it off with his grace, instead of recognizing nothing you do is going to make you right before God, only his work. And what the Christian disciplines are about is not filling us up, not doing something; they are only enabling us to understand the feast of mercy that is already there, because when I understand more of why God has loved me and why I now serve him out of love, that ultimately becomes the power.

Charles Spurgeon, in a wonderful discussion of Christian disciplines, said it this way: "The Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self. He tells us we are nothing but that Christ is all and 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 are grasping Christ as to Christ. We shall never find happiness by looking to our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is not what we are that gives rest to the soul." [I wish he had said "not what we do 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 eyes solely on him. Let his death, his sufferings, his merits, his glories, his intercession be fresh upon thine mind. When thou wakest in the morning look to him. When thou liest down at night look to him."

Think about that. Wouldn't that be wonderful? If what we were doing in those morning devotionals was not bargaining with God to be good to us today because we'll read a little more; but we're simply saying, "Wow, I see Jesus afresh today." And when we go down to bed at night and we pray with our wives for our children and those that we love, that what we're really doing is saying, "Lord let her, let my family, let me see more of Jesus now." Because that will be our strength, that will be our joy. Sometimes I have to have images to make it make sense to me. I recognize I pour the milk for my daughter's cereal every morning. And sometimes I just think, "Lord let me fill up her heart with love for you. Let me find a way to fill up her heart because I know if she's filled up with love for you, she's safe. That's my job today, to fill her up with more love for you."

What I'm trying to have us do in the conclusion is simply this: to learn to preach God's provision of grace as the motivation and enablement behind every instruction; not fail to have instruction, but proper motivation and enablement. The bottom line of Christ-centered preaching is to 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. Jesus said it, right? "Apart from me you can do nothing." And so to have people filled up with that wonderful plan of

redemption, with that wonderful story of how God is always loving and moving toward his people for their sake. If that's what we are telling them, we are filling them up with love for Christ, and that is what makes their obedience honoring to God.

Schaeffer said it this way: "We must learn to bow twice: first we must bow to the divine provision (what God provides) before we bow in obedience. Because if we bow in obedience before bowing to the divine provision our obedience is irrelevant and wrong." Hear that? "And wrong." If I haven't first said, "God how great is your love for me!" then anything I do to satisfy him is only selfishness. But if I say, "God, how great is your love for me! I see it. It's on every page of Scripture. I see it" then love for him fills us and the joy of the Lord fills us and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Next time we'll listen to Clowney, a wonderful preacher, as he does some of this for us and helps us excavate grace from a very unlikely place and then shows us how it deals with application. See you next time.