

# Preaching the Gospel in a Post-Modern World

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Doctor of Ministry Program  
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## Monday

1. 8:30-10:00am- INTRO TO COURSE  
Lecture 40"/Short Q-A (Syllabus: Preface)  
Where does this Course 'fit in'?
  2. 10:15-11:45am- INTRO TO 'MODEL'  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Introduction)  
A Christ-Centered, Tri-Perspectival Model
  3. 1:15-2:30pm - EXPOUND CHRIST #1  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 1)  
Why? Redemptive-Historical Method
  4. 2:45-4:00pm- CASE STUDY  
Sermon TJK/Q-A Gen 18- Jesus **and** the City
- Tuesday
5. 8:30-10:00am - EXPOUND CHRIST #2  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 2)  
How? Christ-Centered Focus
  6. 10:15-11:45am - EXPOUND CHRIST #3  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 3)  
To whom? Gospel-Needing Listeners
  7. 1:15-2:30pm - CASE STUDY  
Sermon TJK/Q-A Luke 15 - The **Two** Prodigal Sons
  8. 2:45-4:00pm - APPLY CHRIST #1  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 4)  
Why? A Theology of Application
- Wednesday
9. 8:30-10:00am - APPLY CHRIST #2  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 5)  
How? Strategies for Application
  10. 10:15-11:45am- APPLY CHRIST #3  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 6)  
To whom? Our **Missional** Context
  11. 1:15-2:30pm - CASE STUDIES  
Sermon TJK/Q-A **Gen** 27- The Problem of Blessing  
**Gen** 29 - The Struggle for **Love**
  12. 2:45-4:00pm- APPLY CHRIST #4  
Lecture 45-19-A (Syllabus: Chapter 7)  
**Entering/Changing** a World-View
- Thursday
13. 8:30-10:00am - APPLY CHRIST #5  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 8)  
The **Gospel** for 'Mixed' Audiences
  14. 10:15-11:45am - ADORE CHRIST #1  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 9)  
Why? The Sense of the Heart
  15. 1:15-2:30pm - CASE STUDIES  
Sermon TJK/Q-A Matt 1 - The Genealogy of Jesus  
**Mark** 5 - The **Man** Who Would Not Be Hurried
  16. 2:45-4:00pm - ADORE CHRIST #2  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus: Chapter 10)  
How? Adoration and Imagination
- Friday
17. 8:30-10:00am - ADORE CHRIST #3  
Lecture 45"/Q-A (Syllabus - Chap 11 Communion with God)  
Who? Communion with God
  18. 10:15-12:00 - CASE STUDY  
Sermon TJK/Q-A John 2 - Lord of the Feast

## Preface -

### WHERE DOES THIS COURSE 'FIT IN'?

#### WHERE DOES IT FIT IN TO OTHER TRAINING IN PREACHING?

##### *'Basic Training' assumed*

This is a D.Min. course, and therefore I **will** assume the traditional M.Div. training in preaching. Two popular, conservative preaching textbooks are Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* 2nd ed. (Baker, 2001) and Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker, 1994). Both of them cover the normal topics of M.Div Homiletics: 1) First, they cover the Biblical theology of preaching--what it is and why it is important and what its purpose is. 2) Second, they treat the actual development of the sermon. This entails a long list of sub-topics such as studying the text, outlining, style of expression, illustration, application. text selection. sermon length, and so on. 3) Third, they address issues related to the person of the preacher in some way. The most 'nuts and bolts' approach is to discuss the actual speaking delivery (issues of voice, pitch, pace, oratorical style, and so on) Another approach is to look at the relationship of preaching to the preacher's life and character and personality. So this present course does not seek to replace this 'basic training' with a new or better version. For example, I will assume the students are working communicators who have learned the specifics of sermon construction.

##### *Recasting preaching to be 'missional'*

However, I will not be moving on to more 'advanced' topics either. This course is not a workshop that goes deeper into more detailed treatment of exegesis or delivery. Instead I want to "re-cast" *missiologically* much of what we already know and do in preaching. I want to do this because a) this is what I had to do in the early and mid-1990's and b) this is what many preachers today sense the need to do as well.

The preaching training that occurs in most seminaries is based on assumptions about the audience and the culture that are less and less true today. An increasing number of people find conventional preaching confusing or offensive.

*"There is a fundamental schism in American cultural, political, and economic life. There's the quicker-growing, economically vibrant...morally relativist, urban-oriented, culturally adventuresome, sexually polymorphous, and ethnically diverse nation...and there's the small town, nuclear-family, religiously-oriented, white-centric other America, [with]...its diminishing cultural and economic force....[T]wo nations..."<sup>1</sup>*

Our growing ministry ineffectiveness is another 'frog in the kettle' phenomenon. It is generally hidden from us. because (at least in the South and Midwest. and even in most other places in the U.S.) a very good church program can still 'grow' a church by transfer and can even produce a stream of converts out of the remaining body of people who are traditional and conservative in sensibility. But, as Wolff notes, this is a **shrinking** part of the American demographic. Eventually evangelical churches and preachers ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of 'Christendom' will have to learn how to become "missional". (See more in chapter 6) In other words, they will have to learn how to speak so that the unbelievers of our present time can at least understand and be challenged by the gospel.

This course is therefore for those working preachers who realize that they need to retool and recast everything they are doing for this new situation. Because I have worked in New York

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Wolff. *New York*. Feb 26 2001, p. 19,

City since 1989, and since NYC tends to be somewhat 'ahead of the curve' culturally, I want to share what I've been learning.

#### 'Type' of preaching and missional context

For example, let's take the old question: *should our* preaching be 'expository'? The traditional categories or 'types' of preaching have been given as 'topical', 'textual', and 'expository'.<sup>2</sup> A topical sermon uses several passages to support a thesis about a particular topic or subject. A textual sermon uses a single passage but mainly to illustrate (or as a jumping off point to support) a thesis. (Sometimes, the term 'textual preaching' is used to refer to the practice of choosing different texts each week instead of preaching consecutively through a book of the Bible.) But an *expository* sermon focuses on explaining a single passage, taking its entire outline and shape from the passage, and allows the **sermon** thesis to arise out of that process of text explanation. The point of the **sermon** must be the point of the writer of the Biblical text.

The division between these approaches is, roughly speaking, this--we can either use **text(s)** to explain/expose our "point", or we can make our point by explaining **and** exposing the text.<sup>3</sup>

Most people in the conservative/evangelical world insist (loudly) that the expository method is the only true and proper way to preach. Other methods are disdained as morally and theologically inferior. But why? 1) First, other forms of preaching are considered 'man-pleasing' because we are choosing texts we prefer rather than preaching through the 'whole counsel of God' as God provides it in the Bible. 2) Second, other forms of preaching are more open to abuse since your thesis is not being controlled directly by the text. 3) Thirdly, other forms of preaching do not show as much honor to the text of Scripture. The expositor focuses on the Biblical passage itself in a way that the others do not.

Despite the 'common sense' appeal of these arguments, there is almost no example in the Bible of any speaker or teacher doing what we would call an expository sermon. Paul's sermons and letters are 'synthetic', drawing from a great variety of Biblical texts. So is the preaching of Peter and others in the book of Acts. So the reasons on which we adopt a preaching 'type' or approach will ultimately be practical ones. Some of the practical reasons are personal with regard to the preacher. (Expository method helps the preacher grow, avoids 'same-ness' of theme and message, **and** so on.) But Haddon Robinson points out in a recent interview that a main reason to use the expository method now is *missiological*.

If you ask why is expository preaching more important today, it is that we don't have the authority that preachers had in the past. The truth is that -- aside from people that have grown up in the church -- the average person in our society does not give high grades to preachers as being intellectual or even moral leaders....Today a lawyer that's defending a minister will do every thing that he can to keep the people in the jury from thinking of him as a minister...Therefore in a postmodern age one reason that we work with the biblical text is to have the authority of the **text** -- and behind that the authority of God -- behind what we say....That is not to say that the person in the pew has to

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see the discussion in Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1995) p. 12-13

<sup>3</sup> The word 'expository' has often been defined more narrowly than this. Some believe expository preaching means going through books of the Bible in series. Some believe it means 'verse-by-verse' close explanation of a text. Not all preaching fits into the 'topical-textual-expository' categories. The typical **Puritan** sermon often did brief exposition of a passage in the first 25% of the sermon and then moved into a topical mode, defending, illustrating, and applying the theme as it was found throughout the Bible. I think the fairest definition is, however, that an expository sermon is one that makes its whole purpose the explanation of the meaning of a passage, and thus the content, structure, and shape of the sermon is controlled by the text.

accept my view of inspiration...[but] I can [still] lay that out before them in a relevant fashion it has the power to do what my authority today can't do. <sup>4</sup>

Robinson is saying that since people don't trust the preacher any more, you've got to show them that your thesis is not your idea alone! Rather, it is the teaching of this ancient and respected text. (Of course, secular people don't trust the Bible either, but--believe it or not--they still will trust an ancient and venerated text more than they do the preacher, as long as they don't find something overtly 'offensive' in it.)

Now the reasoning or the motivation for your expository preaching will have a great impact on the *way* in which you expound. If you do expository preaching because you think that it is the only 'right' way then you will tend to wield the Bible as if it is strong medicine that the children need but don't want but you are going to make them take anyway. But if you do expository preaching because you believe it is the best way today to reach resistant people with the truth, then you will probably **carry** out your preaching course in a different way.

### *Adapting the Expository Method*

For example, many expository preachers take months or years to work through whole books of the Bible, leaving no stone unturned. This is the traditional expository method and it has a venerable history. The Reformed churches stressed the *lectio continua* (preaching through whole books of the Bible in course), rather than *lectio selecta* (which chose a variety of texts, suited to the Christian year, annually covering the whole array of the basic facets of the ministry of Christ, from the prophecies of his coming, to his birth, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.)<sup>5</sup> To a great degree, the *lectio selecta* had gone along with the atrophy of preaching in the Medieval Church, and so the Reformers moved away from in their effort to build up their people's Biblical knowledge. This was a way to expose them to the 'whole counsel of God' and not just to more elementary truths.

However, in my NYC church there are two factors that Calvin and Zwingli may not have faced. First, our congregation largely 'turns over' every two years. (For example, the congregation is 18% college students.) Every September I face the fact that at least **33%** of the people were not there last September. Was that the context that Reformed preachers faced in Zurich and Geneva? I'm sure even in those days urban churches faced this, but probably not to this extent. Secondly, anywhere from 20-35% of **people** present on a given Sunday are conscious non-believers and know little about the basics of Christ's life and work. **Again**, I think the Reformers expected their congregation to largely **remain** in tact from year to year, and to consist almost completely of professing Christians.

My response is similar to what some others have done in highly mobile center city situations.<sup>6</sup> I also have concerns that a complete 'lectionary' method of preaching will not expose the people to a full range of Biblical genre and truth. Yet the number of people who are new to the church and the faith every year could not be ignored. My answer was to 'cross' the *lectio continua* **and** *lectio selecta*. On the one hand, we make sure that every 12 months we 'cover the waterfront' from the nature of God (usually more in the **Fall**, where Old Testament texts are especially appropriate) to the incarnation and person of Christ (December) to the nature and reality of sin (in the bleak **mid-winter**) to the death and work of Christ as a remedy (late winter, early **Spring**, climaxing at Easter) and finally to the power of the Holy Spirit to help us live as we ought (after

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Duduit, "Expository Preaching in a Narrative World: An Interview with Haddon Robinson". *Preaching*. (July-August 2001)

<sup>5</sup> For more background on this part of the Reformed tradition, see Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship That is Reformed According to Scripture* (John Knox, 1984), chapter V: "The Ministry of the Word" and p.171-172.

<sup>6</sup> Dick Lucas and his staff at St.Helen's Bishopsgate in London has for years taken the route of shorter expository series. Even D.M.Lloyd Jones, to his more 'mobile' evangelistic Sunday PM services, did not preach the long expository series that he did with his more settled congregations of believers (on Sunday AM and Friday PM).

Easter into and through the summer). Notice that this roughly follows the church year--preaching on the Father, then the Son, and then the Holy Spirit--though not slavishly. (The treatment of sin and the cross fits in to Lent. The Intro to the person of Christ fits in to Advent.) Notice too that it basically re-capitulates the gospel every year. Thus a new person coming in the fall will be exposed to the whole Biblical 'plot-line'--the gospel. The person may very well come to faith during the winter and then have the spring and summer preaching to help them begin to lead the Christian life.

**And** yet, the sermons come in sets of shorter (4-10 weeks) expository series. Each series is usually from one book of the Bible, or from one author or part of the Bible. And each message itself is thoroughly expository, **explaining** the text. However, the series is always topical as well in that it aims to open up a particular part of the Biblical story **line**, focusing on the nature of sin, or the nature of the new birth, or why Jesus died, or who God is, or what it means that we are sinners, or how the Holy Spirit changes us, and so on. So, for example, a two-year preaching course might look like this.

FALL

Attributes of God from the Prophets. God as Father, Friend. Lover, King  
Apostle's Creed (All texts taken from the Gospel of John)

DEC

The Songs of Christmas (Luke's Songs--Zechariah, Mary, Angels)

WINTER

The New **Birth** (Texts from Peter and Paul on Regeneration and Re-birth)  
Why Did Jesus Die? (St. Matthew's Passion--Chapter **26-thru** 28)

SPRING

Living Life of Faith in a Pluralistic World (Daniel and Esther)

SUMMER

The Lord Praying (John 17 and the Lord's Prayer)

FALL

Our Struggles and God's Grace (Jacob--Genesis 25-32, 48)

DEC

The Mothers of Jesus: **Tamar**, Ruth, **Rahab**, Uriah's Wife, Mary

WINTER

What Did Jesus Come to Die? (The 'Amen' Statements of Jesus)

SPRING

Life of Faith (Abraham--Genesis 12-22)

SUMMER

Arguing with Jesus (Mark 11-12)

(Note: Though it seems that **Fall/Winter sermons** are more 'evangelistically' oriented than **Spring/Summer**, every sermon can address both Christians and non-Christians. See chap 7.1

As I moved away from 'through the book' preaching to this approach. I noticed that ironically it is not possible to really expose your people to *all* of the Bible if you take a year (for example) on the gospel of John. The Bible is simply too big to travel through like that. If you are going to cover all the parts and genres of the Bible, you need to move around rather nimbly. With this "hybrid" of continua and **selecta** you can change topics more frequently, covering the bases for new people and short-timers, **and** also change Bible genres and **books** more frequently for your long-termers. Yet the actual treatment of the **texts** is deeply expository. so we can also exhibit to listeners the importance of listening to Scripture carefully under its authority.

In summary, this course is on how to re-think everything you learn in an **M.Div.** homiletics program 'missionally. It does not mean 'everything you ever learned was wrong'. But it does mean a re-casting of nearly everything you do in preaching.

## HOW DOES IT FIT IN TO CURRENT TRENDS IN PREACHING?

If this course is concerned about preaching in an increasingly secular, 'post-modern' world, how does it relate to the many other voices calling us to change the way we preach in order to be effective in our new situation? And how does it relate to the various 'schools' of preaching on the scene today?

### The current wisdom

For at least 15 years another 'type' of preaching has become popular--called 'narrative' preaching or 'inductive' preaching. (Both these terms overlap, but depending on who is speaking, they are not always identical.) Fred Craddock is often credited with bringing about this new 'revolution' in North American preaching with his 1971 book *As One Without Authority*. Some of this movement came from the new emphasis in hermeneutics on **taking** the Bible's literary shape seriously and on listening to its message (rather than on historical-critical **dissection**).<sup>7</sup> Some of the movement also has come from a late 20th century belief that 'authoritative monologue' is no longer a valid means of communication. But regardless of the causes, there has been a **significant** emphasis placed on story-telling and narrative in preaching.

Cornelius Plantinga, in a great survey article of recent homiletical thought, **identifies** several pieces of advice that the prominent authorities in preaching gives to speakers today, on the basis of this new popular **approach**.<sup>8</sup> *Narrative/Inductive*

First, the design of the sermon should not follow a logical structure, but (as far as possible) a *narrative* one. "For the last quarter-century, prominent writers have united to *reject*... "*discursive*" or "propositional" designs". The sermon structure should "draw us into **the** story, and then move us along *inside* it" rather than "use **the story** to illustrate some doctrinal truths." Sermons should "move, not **by** argument or the application of a thesis, but by *telling* us what happened, and what happened next."

(Therefore)secondly, the sermon should build tension and suspense just like any story does. It should not announce the thesis at the beginning and then proceed to define and defend it. Rather, the thesis should be revealed at the end, as a resolution to the 'plot' of the sermon as well as the story. In other words, you should **turn** the sermon into a story itself--with protagonists, antagonists and resolution. **This** has been called an 'inductive' rather **than** a 'deductive' approach. We take the listeners 'along' as we recapitulate our own study of the text and let them discover the full meaning only at the **end**.

But thirdly, even when you reveal the thesis of the sermon, you should do so the way a story does so. You should abandon formal styles of rhetoric and move toward a more colloquial 'voice'. You should be a story teller, not a lecturer. You should engage the listeners in a conversation rather than dispense information. The preacher should be suggestive and allusive rather than propositional and declarative. We are told "don't give people propositions, but pilgrimage." The preacher must shy away from a frontal approach to truth and come at the mystery of God sideways, making full use of "analogy, *metaphoric* tease, **and** the '*tensiveness*' of parabolic thought"<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, the preacher should be self-revealing. "I don't **think** you can connect with audiences under 50 unless **they** relate to you I **don't think today you** can listen to an effective preacher six

<sup>7</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (Yale, 1974) and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books, 1981). Both these authors point out powerfully how an emphasis on thinking of the **Biblical** authors as editors and 'source splicers' **has** obscured their literary **art** and thus their purposes and messages in communicating.

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, "Dancing the Edge of Mystery:" *Books and Culture* Sept/Oct 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga quoting Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Abingdon, 1997).

weeks and not know quite a bit about him...I want to listen to somebody that has struggled but has found a way through this struggle to find some equilibrium in life."<sup>10</sup> The audience has to be able to visualize themselves as the kind of believer and person the preacher is.]

#### The reaction to 'narrative' preaching

As we have indicated, some of the impetus for the 'narrative preaching' movement has come from mainline Protestant circles where there is less confidence in the inspiration of the Bible and of the possibility of authoritative truth-telling. But many in other circles have also been listening to this movement because of the concern to reach the 'post-modern' generations.

The (now very familiar!) diagnosis goes something like this. These are post-modern times, marked by the collapse of confidence in the Enlightenment project and a rational certainty about 'truth'. So now hearers more intuitive than logical. They are reached more through images and through stories that evoke the senses (at least in the imagination) rather than through propositions and principles. They are also allergic to authoritarian pronouncements and must be 'given an experience' rather than a rational exposition. There are still places where traditional preaching 'works'--in the mid-West and South rather than the Northeast and West Coast, with older rather than younger. But eventually we must adapt to the less rational, non-authoritarian, narrative-hungry sensibilities of our time.

In many quarters of the evangelical church, this advice is being strongly resisted. Many publications and networks are simply making more urgent calls for traditional, authoritative, expository preaching. In many quarters, narrative preaching is pitted against 'expository' preaching. And (indeed) conventional use of the expository method has tended to be pretty 'abstract' and 'discursive'. Traditional expository preachers have tended to expound Romans and Isaiah (or at least the Gospel of John) rather than Ecclesiastes, 1 Samuel, **Mark** and Psalms because it is easier to break such books into propositions and principles.

It would take too long (and might be impolite) to name names and document this, but my impression of the argument of 'the resistance' is that it goes something like this: "Because post-modern people don't like propositional truth, we should give them more of it--now more than ever."

Some simply combine the two methods. Haddon Robinson sees no reason why narrative preaching can't be expository. He sees expository preaching as more a 'philosophy' than a 'method'. He insists that an expository preacher's sermon is always controlled by the form of the text, so that if the text is a story the sermon should be more inductive and the points should follow the story line. If the text is an epistle it could be deductive and discursive. We do not need to make 'narrative' preaching and 'expository' preaching an 'either-or' choice, as do many proponents on both sides. (Much that drives the more extreme proponents of narrative preaching is not a 'missiological' mindset but the old 'liberal' allergy to the idea of propositional truth. Much that drives the more extreme opponents of narrative preaching is a 'culture wars' mindset that sees most all of post-modern culture as evil or harmful.)

The Christ-centered, Tri-perspectival model

*A Better Approach.*

I believe there is a more comprehensive solution to the 'narrative' vs. 'expository' tension (than to simply paste the two methods together depending on the nature of the text).<sup>11</sup> I think it is the same as the solution of the problem of reaching 'post-modern' people.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Dudit. "Expository Preaching in a Narrative World: An Interview with Haddon Robinson", *Preaching*. (July-August 2001)

<sup>11</sup> I don't want to give the impression that 'I alone' present this solution to the problem. Sidney Greidanus, in *The Modern Preacher*, makes the very same point, namely, that Redemptive-Historical preaching is the best 'solution' to the narrative vs. expository argument. He says narrative preaching proponents are right to argue that traditional preaching has obscured the narrative form of the Bible and tended to make it a



Here I must get self-referential. I preach in the heart of Manhattan every week in a church begun almost 13 yrs ago. The audience is average age about 30, is 75% single and only 45% Anglo--almost all 'young urban professionals'. And a surprising number are not sure of where they stand with Christianity or are conscious non-believers. I therefore read **all** the literature on how to reach 'Gen X' and 'post-moderns' with interest since there is no where in the **U.S.** that is more secular and post-modern than Manhattan. Much of what they say rings true, but much of it does not.

On the one hand, almost since the very beginning of the NYC ministry, I have done **all** of the things the 'experts' say I should do. I do preach more on narrative passages **than** I used to and I unfold the story inductively when I do so. It is also true (I see it in my own children) that audiences are unable to follow long **lines** of **sylogistic** reasoning. It is also true that authoritarian pronouncements don't fare well. **A** speaker must demonstrate personal 'authenticity in order to earn the right to be heard. That authenticity is a balance of transparency and humility without self-absorption. **And** it must be artless, not 'spun'--very genuine. Whew! If you try to 'achieve' it you automatically have **failed!** (A perfect example of the difference between the older approach to communication and the newer approach is to watch the 1945 movie *Henry V* with Olivier and compare it with the 1989 movie *Henry V* with Kenneth Branagh. Notice how much more transparent. how much less formal and remote Branagh is (still doing Shakespeare!)) \*

And yet, despite the fact that these are absolutely **necessary** changes (you can't communicate in NYC without them) I feel they are somewhat **superficial**. **Underneath** these important but superficial changes I sense still a hunger for real truth and **answers**. A full-fledged 'narrative/inductive' approach is too indirect and airy. For example, many experts believe we should get rid of the idea of propositional truth, of substitutionary atonement. and of forensic justification because they are 'enlightenment project' (rationalistic, **individualistic**) hold-overs that don't 'connect with' post-modern people. But I found that God's grace and love become ultimately un-remarkable and insipid if not seen against a backdrop of God's holiness and justice.

On the other hand. there are plenty of people on the other side who refuse to see how inadequate the old ways of preaching **truth**, atonement. and **justification** really are now. (These doctrines must now be promoted in new ways as the resolution of the 'story' of post-modern people.)

What I discovered 'worked' so well in this new situation were three **very old** and venerable sources of wisdom for preaching.

① Geerhardus Vos and 'Biblical Theological-Preaching' For many decades there has been a school of thought that has taught the importance of 'preaching Christ from **all** of Scripture'. This grew out of Continental Reformed thought though its earliest published form in the **U.S.** was *Biblical Theology* by Geerhardus Vos of Princeton. The school of preaching has been called 'Redemptive-Historical' or 'Christ-centered'.<sup>12</sup> Sidney Greidanus is a major proponent at Calvin

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repository of 'Biblical **principles**'. On the other hand, it **is insufficient** to simply get out **the** Biblical stories and re-tell them. **Redemptive-historical** approach sees the **entire** Bible as one macro-story and thus **everything** in it can be related to it. It is not **sufficient** to either expound a principle or tell a story without relating to the 'one **big** story' of **God coming** back into the **kingship** of the world through Jesus Christ. (See page 147ff. of *The Modern Preacher*)

<sup>12</sup> The problem with all such names is that they **trivialize** the **opposing** points of view. Robinson's book on expository method is 'Biblical Preaching', which means that all who don't take up his method aren't **being** 'Biblical'. When we call redemptive-historical preaching 'Christ-centered'. we **imply** (strongly!) that those who are not following our method are not 'preaching Christ'.

Seminary (an institution that represents Continental Reformed thought, the original source of this school of preaching.) Graeme Goldsworthy is an advocate in the Australian/English evangelical Anglican world. Edmund Clowney has promoted and expounded it in U.S. evangelical circles and now Bryan Chapell of Covenant Seminary is doing the same. Though I was always subscribed to this approach, it was only in my work in New York City that I saw how profoundly relevant it was **now**. The Christ-centered preaching approach sees the whole Bible as essentially one big story with a central story-line: God restores the world lost in Eden by intervening in history to call out and form a new humanity. This intervention climaxes in Jesus Christ, who accomplishes salvation for us what we could not accomplish for ourselves. While only a minority of Biblical passages actually give the whole story-line, every Biblical text must be placed in the whole story-line to be understood. In other words, every text must be asked: "what does this tell me about the salvation we have in Christ?" to be understood.]

[This understanding of preaching, then, turns **all** preaching into 'narrative preaching' in the broadest sense, and **turns** every sermon into 'inductive preaching' as it reveals its fullness only at the end as it is related to Christ. This is as true for an exposition of an epistle as of 2 Chronicles. This meant that I was able to adapt to the new sensibilities of my audience but at the same time do so in a way that did not move away from theological and doctrinal exposition.]

②. Martin Luther and 'Gospel Preaching' Besides the **post-modern** interest in **stories/images** rather than **propositions**, there is also the post-modern allergy to moral and authoritarian pronouncements. [I discovered that most non-believers had rejected Christianity because they could not distinguish it from **simple morality**.] They could not distinguish a Christian sermon from mere moral exhortation to 'live according to God's rules'. Martin Luther, of course, pioneered an approach to preaching that distinguished between law and gospel. No one was clearer about the difference between gospel or grace motivation for obedience to God rather than moralistic, legalistic motivation.

I discovered that post-modern secular people were extremely sensitive to the difference and found Luther's approach vastly more palatable. Actually, they are more delighted with Luther's approach than many evangelicals are, who seem unaware of the moralistic tone of their preaching and ministry. Luther showed me the way to appeal to people's hearts with the gospel rather than simply putting pressure on their wills with the law.

③ Jonathan Edwards and 'Revival Preaching'. We have also noted the post-modern hunger for experience. Many of the experts insist that we should give audiences 'an experience, not an exposition'. Of course, many react to such a statement with hostility. They see **such an** approach as giving in to the truth-hating, experience-oriented culture. *unified-field theory of personality*

But two and a half centuries ago there was a highly orthodox Calvinist, Jonathan Edwards, who was also standing between an emotionally-charged revival movement and **hostile** gate-keepers of orthodoxy. The industrial revolution and the rise of early capitalism had produced an new individualism in society, and the revivalists were adapting to it full-force, by insisting that hearers have a personal, individual spiritual experience rather **than** relying completely on church membership and doctrinal subscription. Edwards listened to both sides and carefully laid out a brilliant, balanced theology of revival that stands unsurpassed to this day. His theology of revival, as it bore on preaching, insisted that the purpose of the sermon was not simply to get an emotional response **nor** simply to impart information. The purpose of the sermon was not just to make the truth plain but to make it **real**. The aim of the sermon was to give the hearers a 'sense of the heart', an experience of the spiritual reality of truth. With that view in mind, the preacher was not only supposed to dispense data, nor only to arouse the feelings, but rather was to **inflame** the **imagination**. No one ever accused Edwards of being a 'narrative preacher'--but his images and illustrations are fascinating and even stunning.

*The ultimate end of a sermon is not simply to make the truth clear, but to make it real.*

In short, Edwards refused to pit 'truth' against 'experience'. He absolutely insisted on both. In a nutshell, Edwards would say that if a truth about Jesus Christ does not thrill, move, melt, electrify, and change you--then you haven't really *understood* it.

Edwards showed me how inadequate much 20th century expository preaching was. It was highly cognitive, highly abstract. But the solution was not to simply go after anecdotes and sentimental stories that moved the feelings. The solution was to learn to embody the truth in concrete ways--images, illustrations, narratives, and even in the delivery of the sermon itself.

#### *Another personal note*

Though during my seminary years I learned about '**Christo-centric**' preaching from Ed Clowney and about the **Reformed/Lutheran** doctrine of 'sanctification by faith' from Roger Nicole, and about Edwards' revivalism from Richard Lovelace--none of this really effected my preaching as long as I was locked into an evangelical sub-culture. There I was rewarded for traditional exposition that often lacked all of these things. It was in general an abstract, somewhat moralistic pattern of doctrine-application with Christ often tacked on to the end. All during that time. I would have certainly professed to be doing "Christo-centric" preaching, but really, in general, I was lifting Jesus up as an example and urging people to live like him.

It took an intense experience of preaching in New York City to wake me up. Fortunately New Yorkers are far more gregarious than most people and each week I spoke to two dozen people who showed me very directly what they liked and what they didn't like in my sermons. As I began to confront the changes I had to make, I began to realize I had **all** the theological and historical resources necessary. What I had to do (without many or any models to go on) was to combine these three emphases and re-cast them in a 'missional' context. I knew a small number of people who were really 'into' Biblical-theological preaching, or who were trying to recapture Luther's vision, or who were lovers of Edwards, but often these little 'schools' did not learn from each other. (Forexample 'Biblical Theological' preachers are notorious for their lack of personal application. This is not a problem for those who follow Edwards, however.)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the old mainline liberals sensed that modern people were becoming more rational and more skeptical but they over-reacted to this by completely **de-supernaturalizing** the Christian faith, eliminating the heart and core of the Christian gospel and now the mainline is dying. Why? They over-reacted. Modern people did need a much more rational defense and exposition of the faith. but when they sanitized Christianity of all mystery and miracle they 'threw out the baby with the bath water'. Ironically, they didn't just over-react. they over-simplified. But the conservative response to the old liberals was to retreat into fundamentalism. I wonder if we are not going to see something similar happen among former evangelicals over the next 20 years--a divergence, a split. I think many of the emphases in this 'Christ-centered' '**tri-perspectival**' model could keep things together.

#### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Learning how to *understand and teach a text Christo-centrally* by doing genre analysis, discourse analysis, and by recognizing the redemptive-historical **context**.
2. Learning how to *apply and preach a text Christo-centrally* by creating gospel-changed hearts rather than moral reformation. and by addressing the increasingly postmodern culture.
3. Learning how to *pray and deliver a text Christo-centrally* by being open to the power of the Holy Spirit, and by leading and engaging the congregation in worship.

#### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

An integration paper is due in the RTS D.Min. office by April 30, 2002. This assignment should include a seven to eight page manuscript of a sermon and a seven to eight page **explanation** of how you incorporated the insights of the course material into the sermon. The paper should follow the D.Min. requirements for content and style.

Reading reports are due January 7, 2002 (the first day of class). Students must read 2000 pages total of new material (not previously read) and write a one-page standard report (following the reading report form) on each book or article (over 50 pages) which each student has read.

If a book listed under Required Reading has been previously read, the student may substitute readings listed under Recommended Reading for a comparable number of pages. (Some of the books listed in the Recommended Reading section may be out of print.)

Reading List ('T' Theory 'P' Practice)

REQUIRED

- T- Clowney, E.P., Preaching and Biblical Theology. Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1973. 124 pp. [Out of Print- Library Reserve].
- P- Clowney, E.P., The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament. Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1991. 200 pp.
- T- Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: *An Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2000. 272pp.
- P- Keller, Timothy, 'Preaching to the Secular Mind,' The Journal of Biblical Counseling, 14:1 (Fall 1995), 54-62. 9 pp.

RECOMMENDED: (CHOOSE ADDITIONAL BOOKS TO COMPLETE YOUR TOTAL FOR 2000 PAGES OF NEW MATERIAL)

- Alter, Robert, The Art of Biblical Narrative. New York: Basic Books, 1981
- Chapell, Bryan, Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon: A Practical and Theological Guide for Bible Preaching. Baker. 1991. 375 pp.
- \* Dillard, Raymond B., Faith in the Face of Apostasy (The Gospel according to Elijah and Elisha) Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1999. 166 pp.
- Drew, Charles, The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament. (Presbyterian and Reformed. 2000) 128 pp.
- ✗ Duguid, Iain, Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality (*The Gospel according to Abraham*) Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1999. 166 pp.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. Gospel and Wisdom. Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1997. 124 pp.
- Greidanus, Sidney. The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. 74 pp.
- Greidanus, Sidney. Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Manual. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1999. 371pp.
- Logan, Samuel, Ed., The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996. 463 pp.
- \* Longman, Tremper, Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R. 2001. 228pp.
- Longman, Tremper, How to Read the Psalms IVP, 1988. 166 pp.
- \* Motyer, Alec, Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to our Understanding of Christ. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1991. 255 pp.
- Wright, Christopher J.H., Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament. Marshall Pickering, 1992. 256p.

\* TJK Reserving...

## INTRODUCTION -

# A CHRIST-CENTERED, TRI-PERSPECTIVAL PREACHING MODEL

### THE GOAL OF THE SERMON: Lift up Christ

Let's immediately put this in 'down to earth' terms. Kent Hughes tells of an African-American church where there is a very elderly, female member who has a particular concern that the sermons exalt Christ and do not degenerate into mere lecturing or moralizing. If she feels that the preacher is failing of his duty, she begins to call out. 'Get him up! Get...him.. .up!' If you want to learn the model of preaching I want to present, you could simply ask her to transfer into your church. But if that is impractical, you could take the rest of this course. So there is just one goal for a **sermon**—*lift up Christ and his salvation*.

Christ likened himself to the serpent in the wilderness and spoke about his being "*lifted up*" (John 3:14-15). This vivid metaphor includes at least two elements. When Christ was lifted up he was: 1) crucified and 2) visible. The purpose of a sermon is to reveal the saving work of Christ vividly and **powerfully** to the spiritual 'sight' of the hearers. Nothing could have a greater effect. For Jesus said, "*when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself*" (John 12:32). The preacher aims to be a vehicle for that 'drawing'.

### THREE 'PERSPECTIVES' ON THIS GOAL

*Why it is helpful to look at this one goal in three perspectives.*

Nearly everyone thinks and feels that their preaching 'lifts up Christ'. But why don't we do a better job? We have said that in this course we will be offering a model for preaching that borrows from and looks like some other 'schools' of preaching.

One school is "*Redemptive-Historical*" preaching which reads the Bible in a way that stresses the organic unity between unfolding historical stages of God's redemption in Christ. This approach is careful to "preach Christ" and his salvation from every passage of the Bible, whether he is overtly referred to or not. I will also insist on this. But there are major complaints about some preachers who follow this approach. One wrote me: "each **sermon** merely becomes a 'bible overview' sermon that sounds exactly the same". Another school of preaching is in strong reaction to moralism and **wants** to 'preach grace' constantly. I will also insist on this. But the complaint of this approach is (again) sameness from week to week as well as the criticism that the preacher fears to make detailed application and instruction. (This is also a problem with 'redemptive-historical' preaching, though its roots are a bit different.) Out of a fear of legalism the communicator simply 'shows Christ' and claims grace and does not give specific instructions on how to live the Christian life. Finally we have the 'revivalist' tradition of preaching, which does not seek to instruct so much as to give hearers a spiritual sense of Christ—to evangelize or renew them in the power of the Spirit. I will insist on this. But the limitations of 'revivalism' are well-known. It tends to lead to theological shallowness and emotionalism for **its** own sake. (Revivalism has many forms, from the 'sawdust trail' of the frontier to the 'user-friendly' sermons of the mega-church. What all these forms have in common is that the emphasis is on the experience of the listener with little regard for instruction and **truth**.)

However, if we reflect, I believe we can see that these are simply three different ways to get to the same goal. These three approaches 'need' each other. Or better yet, the preacher needs to think of the sermon in all three perspectives or else we fall in to various kinds of imbalances and distortions.

### *The concept of "perspectives"*

I am drawing here from John M. Frame's tri-perspectival approach to knowledge. If you aren't familiar with this, you should have no problem following the rest of my course argument. But here is a sketch of his contribution.

Consider the Trinity. God can be 'viewed' from three perspectives. The "Son" contains the Father and the Spirit. If we explore who the Son is deeply enough, we will learn about the Father and the Spirit. Yet the Son points us to things about God only he can show us. Or you can learn about the whole Godhead through the 'door' of the Father, and eventually come to **learn** all about the Son and the Spirit. Or you can 'come at' God from the 'door' of the Spirit. In short, God himself requires us to look at him in 'multiple perspectives' in order to **truly** understand him.

Frame believes that all knowledge is "**Trinitarian**" or **perspectival**. He speaks of the "normative", the "situational", and the "existential" perspectives. "*Human knowledge can be understood in three ways: as knowledge of God's norm [Law], as knowledge of our situation, and as knowledge of ourselves. None can be achieved adequately without the others. Each includes the others. Each, therefore, is a 'perspective' on the whole of human knowledge.*"<sup>13</sup> Our knowledge becomes distorted if we limit our understanding by leaving out any perspective. For example, we do not become more "Biblical" when in seeking to understand a text we forget the situational and existential perspectives. Frame argues that we do not really understand the meaning of a text of Scripture, unless we can use it. We must be able to apply the text to our world and our selves or we do not really "know" the truth. Why? All revelation is covenantal revelation. Everything that is revealed is revealed by the covenant Lord to make us his servants. Obedience and knowledge are near synonyms. Thus (applying this concept to ethics, he writes: "**Christians should not follow non-Christian models, advocating an 'ethics of law' as opposed to a 'situation ethic' or an 'ethic of authentic existence'. Rather, the Christian ethic should present law, situation and ethical subject in organic unity.**"<sup>14</sup>)

In summary then: each perspective on knowledge actually is a view of the whole, yet we need to deliberately "look" at any object in all three ways if we are to avoid missing one aspect or abstracting it from the others.

Applied to the act of preaching, we can understand it best by looking at it through three 'perspectives'--the relationship of the preacher 1) to the text (expounding), 2) the hearers (applying), and 3) to the Lord himself (experience). The different schools that we have mentioned tend to isolate one perspective and despise the others and thus they can't correct their **own** imbalances.

### *The Model in Paul's writings*

In 1 Cor 1:18-2:5 and Col 1:24-29 we have two remarkably rich passages about ministry in general and preaching in particular. I can only skim the surface here, but these passages show us 'the model' of which we are speaking.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> John M. Frame. The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> For great insights and for support for my comments here see P.T.O'Brien's commentary on Colossians and Anthony Thiselton's commentary on 1 Corinthians.

the Bible only answers the questions it is asked

Paul on the one single purpose: *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" 1 Cor.2:1ff. Paul on the three perspectives: Him we proclaim, admonishing **and** teaching everyone with *all* wisdom, so that we *may* present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I *labor*, struggling with *all* his energy, which *so powerfully works* in me. Col.1:28

Paul discerns three things that he is doing as he preaches Christ. These are not so much three different tasks as much as three perspectives on or aspects of that one basic Biblical goal of lifting up Christ. If you accomplished any one of the three things thoroughly, you would automatically complete the other two as well. However, since we never can never be completely effective, it is wisest to consciously take up each of the three perspectives individually as you write and evaluate your message. What are these three things?

- ① First. Biblical **accuracy** and **Christo-centricity** are the same to Paul--it is "him" (Col 1:28) we must proclaim when we preach the Bible. Notice the 'redemptive-historical' cast to this statement. Paul hasn't preached a text unless he preaches Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 we have the same insight. Surely Paul spoke often from texts of Scripture. and they were all the 'Old Testament'. yet he can say that he 'knew nothing' but Christ **and** him *crucified*. That means he was single-mindedly out of every text of Scripture showing people Christ--not as an example to follow. but as a **savior**--"Christ Jesus, who has *become for* us...*our* righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).
- ② But secondly. the preaching and teaching is done with "**wisdom**" (Col 1:28), which means "practical life-relatedness". Paul did not think it is possible to simply expound the meaning of a text without application. The preaching must be aimed artfully at the hearts of people so as to produce real life changes. Notice too the interesting 'contextualization' Paul mentions in 1 Cor 1:20. He says that Jews are interested in practical power and Greeks in intellectual wisdom. When Paul preached Christ he both resisted and adapted to these cultures. because he showed them the cross--weakness to the Jews and stupidity to the Greeks. And yet, rightly understood, the cross **is** power and it is wisdom. **So** Paul shows the Greeks and Jews how Jesus **is** ultimately the kind of wisdom and power they really need. We will look at this more later.
- ③ Thirdly. we see that preaching was no detached. clinical exercise. There was a churning spiritual power. which gave Paul an intense **internal** yearning as he preached--"**struggling** with *all* his energy, **which** so powerfully *works* in me." (Col 1:28) Those who heard Paul must have been impressed that the truth had already exploded with God's **transforming** power inside Paul's soul. On the other hand, 1 Cor 2:3-5 tells how his preaching affected the hearers. It fell on them "with a **demonstration of the Spirit's power**". Here Paul says he deliberately eschewed the typical **forms** of rhetoric and logic used by Greek orators. He wanted the Spirit to work with power on the hearers. and therefore he was careful not to make his messages too much like a logical 'lecture'.

incarnational  
preaching?

So here we **see** Paul's three concerns: 1) to expound each text to show us Christ, no matter where it is in the Bible. 2) to apply it to the particular personal needs and according to the particular cultural sensibilities of the hearers. and 3) to seek a spiritual impact on their hearts and lives **rather than** just to convince minds.

In **our fear** of subjectivism, Reformed folk discuss preaching and teaching almost exclusively in terms of the first perspective. A sermon is seen to be a "success" as long as it is a true and accurate exposition of Holy Scripture. But accuracy is a means, not the goal of preaching. The goal is "changed lives"--everyone **perfect** in Christ (Col 1:28).

## #1 EXPOSITION

Preach Christ, not just Biblical principles ("*Prophetic*" or *Normative aspect*)

Perspectival Goal: *To expound and teach the text so they understand Christ. You haven't expounded the text unless you have integrated its particular message with the climax of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It is to ask: 'what does this tell me about Jesus?'*

Perspectival Sub-goals:

Be "texto-centric". "*What did the human author intend to say to his original hearers?:*

Discover the human author's original intended meaning as much as possible. Don't jump out to put the text in 'redemptive-historical' context or into **cultural/personal** application too quickly. (Keep in mind that there is no perfectly pure way to do this. You only get out of the text the questions you ask it. and you come from the beginning with questions in mind from your context.)

Be "Christo-centric". "*Why did God put this here? 'What does this tell me about the person/work/teaching of Jesus?'*" Now the aim is to explain the text in its overall Biblical context, which is always to situate the text in the 'redemptive-historical' framework. and see how it contributes to the overall story line of the Bible.

Be "Gospel-centered". "*How do I preach the gospel to the hearers through this text? In what ways does this text show us our need for salvation, the form or provision of salvation, the means appropriate salvation, or the marks and fruit of salvation? How does this 'take' on the gospel help the non-Christians that are present? How does it help the Christians that are present?*"<sup>16</sup>

Answer these 4 questions & will always have the Gospel in the sermon.

The main alternative among conservative/evangelicals is 'to expound Biblical principles'. In this approach, preacher places the text only into 'systematic theological' context and then explains how it supports both orthodox doctrine and personal ethics. But the text often is not put into 'redemptive-historical' context to reveal what this tells us specifically about the person and work of Christ.

## #2 APPLICATION

Produce changed people, not just moral people. ("*Kingly*" or *Situational aspect*)

Perspectival Goal: *To apply and counsel with the text so that they put on Christ. You haven't really solved an individual or community problem unless you have shown the solution to be Christ's person and work, not just moral effort. It is to ask: "how am I failing to rejoice in and live as if this were true about who Jesus is and what he did?"*

Perspectival Sub-goals:

Application should aim at 'true virtue' rather than moralism. Gospel virtue or 'true virtue' (J. Edwards) is behavior and character change based on identity change and motivational change, stemming from an inner grasp of God's glory and grace, especially in the work of Christ. Moralism is superficial behavioral change based on fear and pride without true inner change.

Application should be 'contextualized' rather than ethno-centric. The gospel must be preached as the resolution to the cultural 'story'--the hopes, fears, dreams, aspirations--of the listeners. not to those of the speaker or of the past or of some other cultural group thought to be superior to those of the listener. (See footnote on this page.)

Application should be personal rather than abstract and general. The sermon should be like counseling at some points, not only declarative. It should anticipate objections,

<sup>16</sup> This aspect of the model and the 'contextualized' aspect of the model basically render the distinction between 'evangelistic' and 'edificational' sermons obsolete.



calm fears, confront prejudices, and give directions--all very specific and concrete, not vague and ambiguous.

The typical alternative is "to call for moral reformation". This approach merely exhorts people to try hard to live up to Biblical principles. It usually preaches justification by Christ's work, but it encourages sanctification by our work rather than Christ's.

### #3 SENSATION<sup>17</sup>

**Make truth real**, not just clear ("Priestly" or Existential aspect)

Perspectival Coal: To *worship* with the text so that they rejoice in Christ. You haven't really fulfilled the text's purpose unless you aim to bring people into the presence of God through Christ and give them a true 'sense of God' on their hearts. This is to ask: '*how* does this text *show* me *the* beauty of God in Christ?"

*The people can tell if you are looking at a beautiful sight.*

Perspectival Sub-goals:

**Adoration.** The ultimate purpose of our ministry is 'that in all things he might have the supremacy' (Col 1:18). Therefore the goal of the sermon is to get people to worship Jesus on the spot. You want them to sense in the heart that he is more worthy than they had thought, and to give him what he's worth right then and there. You want to move them to give him the supremacy in their lives in a new way.

**Imagination.** The way to move from cognition to heart 'affection' is to engage the imagination. A sermon must engage the senses through image, illustration, narrative--rather than simply imparting principles and propositions.

**Eommunion.** Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can have an experience of illumination (Eph 1:15-23) and of God's presence (Acts 4:31). This is the goal of every sermon. And since the key to changed lives is a heart-grasp of the finished work of Christ, the sermon aims to have people begin to grow into Christ-like character at that very moment.

The typical alternative is simply 'to provide information'. Of course, the setting for your communication is all important. Is this a lecture or the sermon in a worship service? But regardless of the setting, the goal is not just information-transfer. Jesus is a living person, and the goal of **every** communication is to get the hearers to sense him as such.

### Christ the Key to the Model

Despite the fact that being 'Christo-centric' appears as a sub-goal under exposition, this is not ultimately one factor among several. We must remember that "Christo-centric" goal of 'lifting up Christ' suffuses the whole and is the key to it all. How so?

It is **only** as you show how the text reveals Christ that you truly expound its meaning. It is only as you use solve problems **with** Christ that you truly change lives. It is only as you point to the ultimate reference in Christ that the presentation jumps from being a 'Sunday School lesson' **into** an act of worship.

### ALTERNATE PREACHING MODELS

Without all three aspects, we are left with something inadequate. Some examples:

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<sup>17</sup> I am not using the term in its more colloquial meaning of something that is 'sensational' but in its older meaning of experience rather than just cognition. You may know (rationally) that honey is sweet without having sensed (tasted) it.

1. "Doctrinal". When preaching concentrates too much on expounding the text and too little on the other aspects, it 'hits' the intellect rather than the heart and the result is more of a 'lecture'. It is neither life-converting nor does it lead the hearers to corporate worship.

The average seminary graduate tends to preach like this. They expect that they only have to present the results of their exegesis and the Spirit of God will move. These are some of the worst possible sermons.

Many approaches to preaching now being emphasized in the Reformed evangelical world fall under this category, for fear of the excesses of pietism and emotionalism and sensationalism. In my estimation, much that is called 'Redemptive-Historical' fits in to this category because of its lack of application and its 'Bible-overview' repetitiousness. On the other hand, many criticize the R-H approach and urge the retention of the older forms of 'expository' preaching, whether in the "Dallas Seminary" model (longverse-by-verse commentary) or the "Evangelical Anglican" model (short, lucid outlines elucidating the text) or the 'Puritan' model (heavy **theological/doctrinal** exposition and then long application sections). None of these models are very Christo-centric and thus tend at least to be very lecture like (Dallas. Evang-Anglican) or very moralistic (Puritan). There is little joyfulness or a sense of worship.'

[Note: Despite these criticisms, I would insist that the model we are presenting has strong claim to the terms 'Redemptive-Historical' and 'Expository' as well.]

2. "Practical". When preaching goes very light on exposition or sensation and concentrates too much on applying, it 'hits' the will rather than the heart and the result is more of a 'how-to talk'. It does not challenge the mind and (again) it does not lead the hearers to corporate worship on the spot. Several forms of this have been popular in our century. In the church growth movement, there has been emphasis on 'user-friendly' motivational sermons that focus on setting priorities, handling stress, raising our families, and so on. In the mainline church, liberal activist preaching starts with commentary on current social injustice and then moves to practical action plans to deal with it. In many fundamentalist churches, sermons are little more **than** moralistic exhortations to "live right".

3. "Devotional". When preaching concentrates too much on arousing feelings of devotion and too little on the other aspects, it 'hits' the emotions rather than the heart. While this may provide sentiment at the moment, the understanding has not be renewed and converted and therefore the *life* remains unchanged. In the last decade, there has been a major emphasis on what is loosely called 'narrative preaching'. Often one or more lengthy stories, taken from the Bible or elsewhere, are re-told in a dramatic and gripping way. **As** we will see. Christ-centered preaching does something similar, but much narrative preaching uses the story to work on feelings only.

Summary. To a great degree our current preaching 'schools' are reactions to the excesses of other schools. This is always a danger. The people who do too little application are reacting to 'moralism'. The people who do too much **doctrinal/textual** teaching are reacting to 'mysticism' or 'sensationalism'. It would be far better to appreciate and value nearly all of these approaches. The best proponents of each are usually very effective and (I think) that is because they 'borrow' from other traditions and approaches.

## EVALUATING OUR PREACHING

Though this model is not a practicum, it should lead to much better evaluation of your own preaching. Here are some evaluative questions for a sermon based on this model.

### Truth

Was it sound?

What was the point--was it clear?

Was Jesus preached as the climax or was he added on or missing?

### Life

Was it fresh?

What difference will it make--was it practical?

Was Jesus preached as the solution or were the people told to try harder?

### Power

Was there a sense of God?

What was the central metaphor--was it gripping?

Was Jesus made visible or only taught about?

## A Longer Evaluation Form.

### **TRUTH**

#### *Is it Biblical?*

- Are the assertions validly rooted in the text? Do they convincingly arise from the text? Do they square with the analogy of faith--the whole of Scripture?
- Are the assertions validly rooted to the **redempt/historical** context? Was the central theme solved or illustrated by Christ? Was it really about Jesus?

#### *Is it clear?*

- Was it obvious what the speaker was driving at during the **talk**? Was the progression traceable?
- When it was over, did you know what the main point was? Was it persuasive to the hearers. using lines of argument they could follow?

### **LIFE**

#### *Is it insightful?*

- Was it clear that the speaker understood the hearers' 'reality'--their very own hopes. fears. problems, concerns? Did it leave out non-Christians or Christians?
- Were the assertions put in a fresh, wise, and **striking** way, or was it rather boring or cliché-ridden?

#### *Is it practical?*

- Were instructions given on how to implement and practice concrete changes in **behavior**?
- Was Christ and his finished work applied as the practical solution to any problem? Was moralizing or psychologizing avoided and distinguished from the gospel?

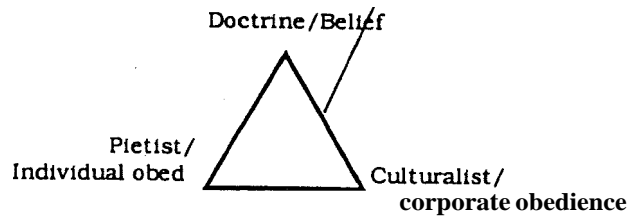
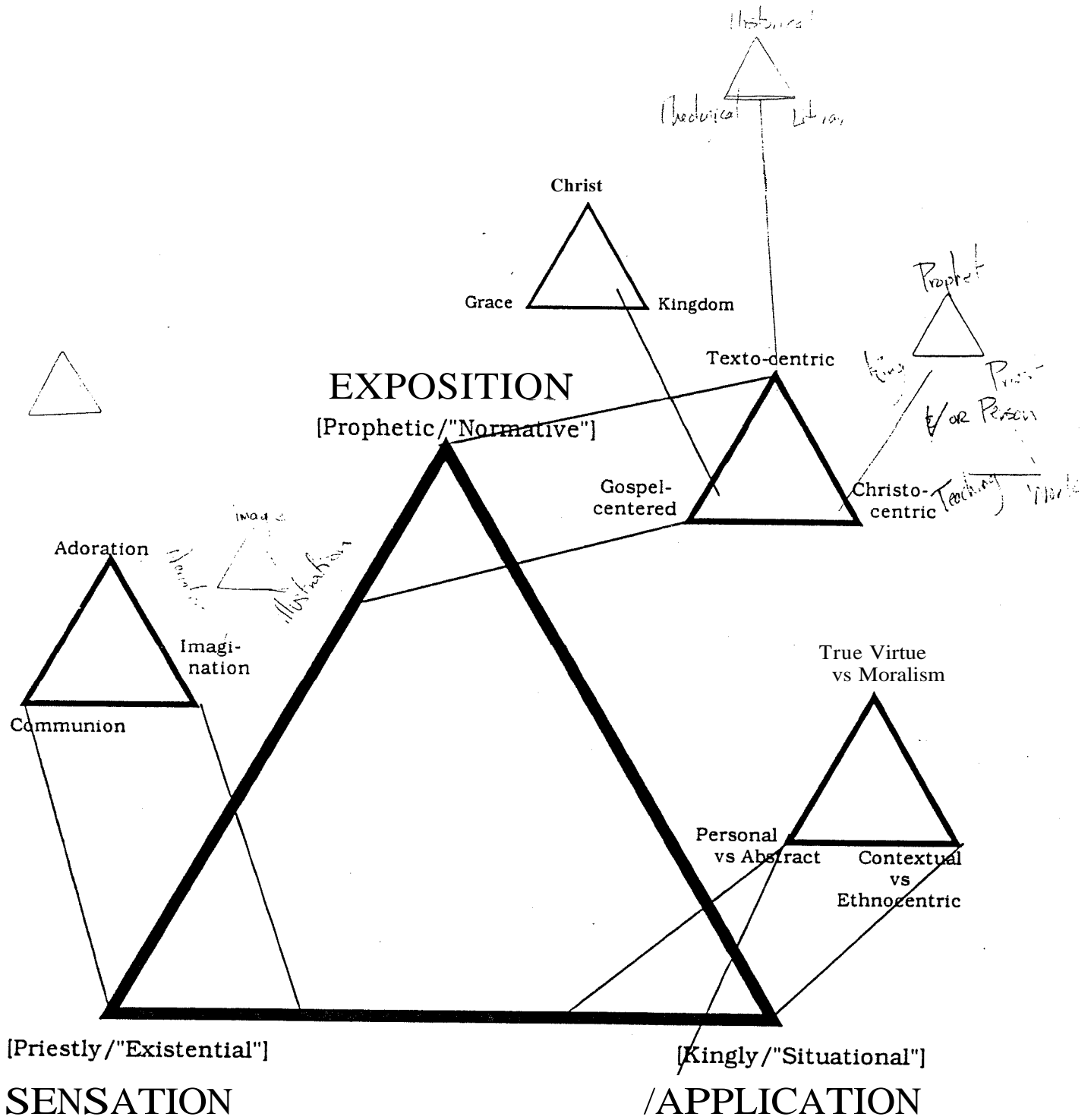
### **POWER**

#### *Is it vivid?*

- Were there some central metaphors used so the basic concepts are given concrete form? Were the five senses appealed to? Was the imagination engaged?
- Was Christ presented in some concrete aspect of his person or work? Were one of the Biblical metaphors for him invoked? Did he become 'visible'?

#### *Is there transcendence?*

- **Was** there a goal to merely instruct. or to get people face to face with God? Did the speaker seem aware of God or just aware of his sermon and audience?
  - Was there a balance of warmth. love, and humility on the one hand, and force. power, authority on the **other**?



## EXPOUNDING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 1 -

## WHY? THE REDEMPITIVE-HISTORICAL METHOD

### Introduction

The ability to 'expound Christ from every part of the Bible' is the foundational skill in this model. Many people a) resist this approach (on the 'left?') as hyper-orthodox or (on the 'right?') as not sufficiently honoring the original author's intent. Others just avoid this approach for pragmatic reasons, claiming that it is too difficult to do week after week. Still others complain that (when not done skillfully) it leads to a 'Bible-overview' repetitiousness in preaching, or that it fails to 'come down to earth' and tell us specifically how to live. All these complaints have some merit! (Especially when the R-H hermeneutic is seen as a 'cure all' for preaching apart from the whole model.)

There are both dangers and difficulties that attend this approach--but I believe there is no alternative to it for three reasons. It is *theologically* (hermeneutically) *required* because all Scripture is about Jesus (Luke 24: 44-47). It is *pastorally* required because it is a faith-sight of Jesus that transforms (Col 1:28), not compliance with principles. It is *missiologically* required because it **is Jesus** who 'completes the story' of every culture (1 Cor 1:20). Only by preaching Christ and thus the gospel from every text will we be able to both edify believers and evangelized non-believers at the same time.

### DISCERNING THE APPROACH

There are two basic approaches to discovering the unity of the Bible in an effort to answer the question: "*what does the (whole) Bible teach about....?*" One approach is the Systematic-Theological method (STM) which deals with the Scripture topically. It organizes what it says by asking: "*what does the whole Bible teach about God? sin? the Holy Spirit? the Church? marriage and family? Prayer?*" It looks at every text on a topic and synthesizes them into a set of statements or principles. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, is largely the product of the STM.

Another approach is the 'Biblical-Theological' or (better) 'Redemptive-Historical' method (RHM) which deals with the Scripture historically. It deals "Diachronically" rather than "synchronically" with the Bible. It sees the Bible less as a depository of individual pieces of data that must be organized and summarized and more as a history of God's salvation--a redemption-history. It notices, for example that the Bible shows little or not concern for historical events that the world would consider momentous. Instead, it only concerned with those events that reveal the unfolding saving words and actions of God. (e.g. How the 'biographies' of Jesus--the gospels--spend up to 50% on the last week of his life.) The Bible is not primarily not a source of information about how to raise a family or handle money but a redemption-history.

Thus the RHM **organizes** what the Bible teaches by looking less at category-topics and more at 'longitudinal themes' that re-appear in each historical epoch and thus asks: "*how does creation, the kingdom the temple/presence of God, the people of God, the covenant, the promises, the atonement-develop in every age and climax in the work of Christ?*" (There is no ultimate reason why these two approaches have to contradict, but we will look more at the relationship of these two methods below.)

Bryan Chapell uses an acorn to illustrate the RHM. If to you I describe the acorn just as it is (it is 1 inch long, brown, has two parts) without explaining what the acorn has the potential to grow into (there is an entire tree within it!) I have not helped you understand the acorn. If I describe Moses or David as men of faith but do not show how they point to the ultimate Moses or David then I haven't really helped you understand these men or their stories.

Summary. In other words, the RHM believes that the purpose of every part of the Bible and therefore every text is to bear witness to who Christ is and what he came to do. Every text is about Jesus.

## RATIONALE FOR THE APPROACH

### 1. *The direction of Jesus.*

When Jesus met the two disciples on the road to **Emmaus**, he discovered that they were in despair because their Messiah had been crucified. He responds. "**how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!**...and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-29) Later he appears to his disciples in the upper room, and we are told "**He said to them This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.**" Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." (Luke 24:44-45). Jesus blames the confusion of the disciples on their inability to see that all the Old Testament is "all" about him and his salvation. Another place where Jesus makes this same assertion is Jn 5:31-47. Jesus says that the Father has testified to him in the Scriptures (v.39). But he confronts his hearers with how they do not understand the Scriptures' testimony. He says, for example, that they think they follow Moses, but "**Moses wrote about me.**" (v.46). The Law of Moses can only be understood as it points to Christ.

### 2. *The example of the apostles.*

The apostolic writers are famously 'Christ-centered' in their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul and the writer of the Epistles to the Hebrews, for example, continuously quote Psalms as the words of Christ--and not just 'Messianic' or 'Royal' Psalms where the speaker is some clearly Messianic figure. For example, Hebrews 1:14 quotes Psalm 91:11-12-"**For he will command his angels concerning you...so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.**" But when we as readers look at Psalm 91 we see absolutely nothing that would indicate the subject is Jesus or some Messianic figure. How can the Hebrews author know that this Psalm is about Jesus? Some would say--'he was inspired by the Holy Spirit'. Of course that is true, but that begs the question. Though all Biblical writers were inspired as they said **everything** wrote, the question is--did it require supernatural knowledge to know everything they wrote? For example, they were inspired when they said that 'Jesus rose on the third day', but did it take divine revelation to know that it happened? Were there not lots of others, 'uninspired' Christians who knew this and preached this as well?

Now the question is--did it take supernatural knowledge to know that Psalm 91 was about Jesus? Perhaps. But it is just as likely that the early church knew that everything in the Scriptures was about Jesus. Therefore both apostles **and** everyone else were able to interpret the whole Bible **Christologically**. What we have in these New Testament usages of the Old Testament then shows us how the entire early church read the Bible. It gives us warrant and direction to read the Bible in the same way.

The gospel writers also quote passages from the Psalms **and** Prophets that clearly show they-- read the words of the Scripture as being all about Jesus. Peter writes: "**Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and the circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow....They spoke of the things that have now **bee** told you by those who preached the gospel**

to you by the Holy Spirit...into which things even angels long to look." (1 Peter 1:10-12) He shows that the 'Spirit of Christ' in the prophets was pointing to the person and work of Christ in their writings.

So it is not likely that Jesus or Peter are simply talking about isolated, explicit predictions of the Messiah (cf. Gen.3:15; Is.9:6; 53). That wouldn't do justice to the comprehensiveness of the language employed. Jesus says that "*all the Scriptures*" point to him and that *each* part--the Law, the Prophets, and the Wisdom literature--are about him (Luke 24:44-45). It is particularly interesting that he would say that the '*Law*' is about him! We might understand how he could say that the prophetic literature was about him—but the *Law*? What we have here is that all the major themes, major figures, major genres, and major story lines are reflective of and fulfilled in him.

SUM: Every part of the Bible about the historical unfolding revelation and accomplishment of the gospel salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul shows in Galatians 3 that there is a complete unity in the Bible. There is a story within all the Bible stories. God is redeeming a people for himself by grace in the face of human rebellion and human desire for a religion of good works.

### 3. *The problem of 'moralism'.*

The ultimate reason that we expound Christ in every passage is because that's the truth! The whole Bible is about Christ. That is the 'theological-hermeneutical' reason for the RHM.

But there is a 'theological-pastoral' reason as well. Bryan Chapell points out in a taped message that we are to preach Christ to 'complete' the hearers (Col 1:28: NIV-'*perfect*' is better rendered '*complete*'.) This means that our preaching assumes fallenness and incompleteness in the listener. Chapell goes on to say that any sermon that does not focus on Christ and his saving work, but only provides 'marks of a good church' or 'marks of a strong family' or 'how to pray' is to provide a 'sub-text' message that the listeners can complete themselves or make themselves acceptable to God. Even if the preacher does not say that, even if the preacher says many true things about the text--if the preacher does not put the text into the overall message of salvation by grace and the finished work of Christ, the listener will automatically hear through a moralistic '*grid*'. A sermon that only tells listeners how they must live without putting that into the context of the gospel gives them the impression that they are complete enough to pull themselves together if they really try hard.

Ed Clowney points out that if we ever tell a particular Bible story without putting it into *the* Bible story (about Christ), we actually change the meaning of the particular event for us. It becomes a moralistic exhortation to 'try harder' rather than a call to live by faith in the work of Christ. There is, in the end, only two ways to read the Bible: is it basically about me or basically about Jesus? In other words, is it basically about what I must do, or basically about what he has done? If I read David and Goliath as basically giving me an example, then the story is really about me. I must summons up the faith and courage to fight the giants in my life. But if I read David and Goliath as basically showing me salvation through Jesus, then the story is really about him. Until I see that Jesus fought the real giants (sin, law, death) *for* me, I *will* never have the courage to be able to fight ordinary giants in life (suffering, disappointment, failure, criticism, hardship). The Bible is not a collection of 'Aesop's Fables", it is not a book of virtues. It is a story about how God saves **us**. ]

The issue of '**application**' has its own chapters and sessions, later in the course, so we won't belabor this **point** here, but it is important. Any exposition of a text that does not 'get to Christ' but just 'explains Biblical principles' will be a 'synagogue sermon' that merely exhorts people to exert their wills to live according to a particular pattern. Instead of the life-giving gospel, the sermon offers just one more ethical paradigm to crush the listeners.

A BASIC DESCRIPTION OF THE APPROACH

I believe that most preachers today miss the value of the RHM for preparing sermons. Therefore I will provide a concrete, personal model for using it in interpreting texts and preparing sermons.

### 1. DISCERNING THE 'SALVATION STORY-LINE'

'Biblical theology' or the RHM posits that "it is the *nature of biblical revelation* that it *tells a story rather than sets out tuneless principles in the abstract*... If we allow the Bible to tell its own story, we find a coherent and meaningful whole".<sup>18</sup> The central story of the Bible is the story of redemption of salvation (thus the term 'redemptive-historical' method). The story is how 1) God initiates a saving work that we cannot do for ourselves 2) in order to a) create a new people for himself out of lost humanity and b) a new creation out of a marred and broken world. To do this takes justice and power on God's part, but also love and mercy. Only in Jesus Christ is it ultimately revealed how God's holiness and love can work together for saving purposes. Then, in him, all the themes--God's initiating grace, his redeeming provision, his presence with his covenant people, his renewing kingdom, and all others--come to a climax and fulfillment in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. There is no part of the Bible nor text of the Bible that does not participate in these longitudinal 'salvation' themes.

The pre-fall and fall accounts (Genesis 1-3) show us the world as God designed it to be and the reasons it has fallen from its original design. Thus this part of the Bible shows us why salvation in Christ is needed, and what that future restoration will look like.

The post-fall narratives (Genesis 4-11) show the inadequacy of human effort or God's judgement alone to bring about renewal of the world. God's design for creation seems thwarted by human sin. The story-line and plot of the Bible goes dark very quickly. There is little hope.

The patriarchal narratives, however, show us hope. We see God beginning to intervene in the world's life. Some protagonists (besides God) appear--Abraham, Joseph, etc. We see the embryonic shape of his saving purposes: his sovereign, free grace, his intention to create a new humanity--a new people for himself, the necessity and nature of faith, the promise of a land, of blessing, of God's presence, of mission, and of a future Messiah. It is obvious that the protagonists relate to God through faith and grace, not works--but much the redeeming provision is cryptic and unclear. Why can God continually forgive and work with and be present with people that he should destroy? Why doesn't he destroy them as he did in the accounts of the Flood and of Babel? The Biblical story plot 'thickens'.

The exodus and the giving of the law clarify both how radically gracious God is (since the deliverance from Egypt happens before the giving of the law) and yet how inexorable the law and justice and righteousness of God are. God gives both the law and the sacrificial system as a pointer to the substitutionary atonement, which will be his redemptive provision. The tabernacle now makes God's presence among his people a permanent thing. The law (as well as the wisdom literature) reveals God's interest in justice in the world and his desire for a people who are distinct in every respect--a truly 'new humanity'--who will be a light attracting the nations. The nature of the coming kingdom is clarified and focused also in the history of the **leaders** of Israel. Despite times of decline (the judges) there are times of rising hope that the saving purposes of God will be fulfilled and the world will turn back to God. These hopes **climax** in the career of David.

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But the post-David prophetic period makes clear that God's grace, redemption, covenant, the promise of a land and a kingdom will not be fulfilled by physical Israel or its human prophets, priests, heroes, and **kings**. The decline of Israel brings us the prophets who 'move the story line' along in two ways. Negatively, they expound and develop the great longitudinal saving themes by way of critique of Israel. As they castigate and condemn the rebellious nation in

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<sup>18</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2000), p. 22.



'covenant lawsuit' they provide greater insight into the mission of the people of God in the world, the social and personal righteousness God is 'after' in his people, and also the twin mistakes of licentiousness and self-righteousness/legalism. Positively, the prophets begin to (more clearly than ever) point ahead to how God will fulfill all his promises in eschatological fullness in the future. The first major prophets, Elijah and Elisha have a remarkable ministry of unprecedented 'signs and wonders'. Under their hands, 'the blind see, the lame walk, the dead raised, and good news is preached to the poor.' These are signs of the powerful restoration the kingdom will bring. A *final* rebuilt temple, an *ultimate* return from exile, a consummate and *perfect* kingdom--are all now in view.

The ministry of Jesus in the gospels shows us how Jesus is the fulfillment and climax of all the longitudinal themes of God's salvation. In him all the 'plot tensions' are resolved. (How can God's promises be conditional--upon our obedience, yet unconditional--upon his grace?) In him all the protagonists of history are re-capitulated and succeed where they previously failed. In his life-story we have the world-salvation story re-told. (We have darkness, a light and promise, a rising hope which is dashed on Good Friday, and then an unlooked for victory out of defeat.) Finally, the primacy of grace, always present in the former ages, is now crystal clear in the ministry of Christ. His ethical example to us is secondary and based on his saving work for us. We are not saved through our imitation of him, but (ironically) in his substitutionary 'imitation' and representation of us.]

The church now lives in the "overlap" of the ages between the first and second comings of Christ. So the 'story of salvation' is not over, despite its climax in Christ. There is an intensification and progression of all the longitudinal themes now and yet an incompleteness for the kingdom of God is 'already' but 'not yet'. So on the one hand, the Christian community *itself* is now God's temple--we have the Holy Spirit and presence of God. The mission of the people of God as a light to all the nations is now overt rather than implicit. The people of God is now multi-national, multi-ethnic. Much of the wisdom (from the wisdom literature) and the righteousness (from the law) can now characterize us as individuals and a community through the power of the Spirit. But, on the other hand, our ethical and life-paradigm now is the cross. In the church age the kingdom moves ahead through loss and poverty and rejection and service and weakness.

The new heavens and new earth are the ultimate end of God's redemptive work in Christ. The RHM helps us see that the goal of God's work in Christ is not escape from the world but the renewal of the whole world. Heaven will re-unite with the earth and the whole world will become a giant *holy-of-holies*.]

**Summary:** It is Jesus that makes all these stories *one* story. Only when we understand all the previous stories and pointers (types) do we realize the richness and fullness of who Christ is. But on the other hand, only when we understand him (anti-type) do we understand what the pointers **and** all the other stories were about. We cannot fully understand one without the other. So for example, when in John 3 Jesus says he is like the serpent lifted up in the wilderness he puts the Serpent-in-the-wilderness into *the* Big Story. Yes, the purpose of the comparison is that the serpent incident sheds light on how Jesus saves us (e.g. it only takes a look, he is made like and treated like the sin that is killing us, etc.)--but on the other hand it means that we can't understand the incident of the serpent without realizing that it points us to Christ. Jesus shows us that the Bible is not an interesting set of isolated stories, each story telling us something different about how to live. Rather, Jesus unifies all the chapters into one story.

*"There are great stories in the Bible...but it is possible to know Bible stories, yet miss the Bible story...The Bible has a story line. It traces an unfolding drama. The story follows the history of Israel, but it does not begin there, nor does it contain what you would expect in a national history....If we forget the story line...we cut the heart out of the Bible. Sunday school stories are then told as tamer versions of the Sunday comics, where Samson*

*substitutes for Superman. David...becomes a Hebrew version of Jack the Giant Killer. No, David is not a brave little boy who isn't afraid of the big bad giant. He is the Lord's anointed...God chose David as a king after his own heart in order to prepare the way for David's great Son, our Deliverer and Champion..".*

- E. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*

## 2. LOCATING/READING THE TEXT IN ITS **TWO** CONTEXTS

Sidney Greidanus writes. "We can *define* 'preaching Christ' as preaching *sermons* which authentically integrate the message of the text with the *climax* of God's revelation in the person, work, and teaching of Jesus Christ..."<sup>19</sup> This definition assumes that every text has **both** a 'micro' and a 'macro' context.

To understand any **particular** text of the Bible, we must **first** put it into the 'micro' context--its historical and linguistic setting, in order to discern the immediate intent of the human author. This is what in the 20th century has come to be known as the 'grammatico-historical' method, and it is crucial. We must use every tool we have to discern what the original author meant to say to the original readers of the text. We study the use of language, we study the historical context. We put the text in the context of the whole book, and so on.

But every Biblical text also has a 'macro' context--its place in the entire Bible which has as its **purpose** the revelation of Christ as the climax of all God's redeeming activity in history. We must not only **ask**: 'what did the human author intend to say to his historical audience?' but **also** 'why did God inscripturate this as a way of pointing to the salvation of his Son?'

So the Redemptive-historical method of interpretation insists that we put each text not only into the context of its original setting and author-intent but also into the context of its 'the Big story of salvation' as traced above. The interpreter must 'locate' the text, recognizing what place it holds in the developing salvation-story line (i.e. what stage in redemption-history it occupies.) So what does that mean? I suggest the following two practical measures.

a. First, it means recognizing the text's 'limitations'. This may sound a bit shocking--isn't all Scripture inspired? Of course, but revelation is progressive. If we fail to put a text in its redemptive-historical context, we will run into trouble. For example, if the purpose of the Elijah narratives (as one minister put it) "is to teach us how to walk close to the Lord and be courageous", then we have some problems with the prophet's behavior! Should we go out and kill false teachers as Elijah did with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18)? If we see the purpose of 1 Kings 18 to be mainly **instruction** on how to live--and if we preach it as such--we will either be simply confused and embarrassed by Elijah's conduct or we will mislead Christians into a holy war mentality (!) ignoring the different stage of redemptive history in which we are now (Matt 26:52). **But** if the focus of every Biblical text is not on us and our behavior but on God and his saving activity, then the purpose of Elijah's ministry is to point us to salvation in Christ. We **can** say about Elijah. "Jesus told us to put up our swords and the cross shows us that the kingdom of God moves forward now in **sacrificial** service. But we do learn here that all religions are not alike!". So we must be aware of the 'limitations' or incompleteness of every stage in redemptive history before **Christ.**

b. Second, It means **teasing** out **all the text's clues** to how **salvation 'works'**. The traditional '**exemplarist**' approach to the Bible (not just the Old Testament, but the New Testament! **See** note 2 below) tends to look for **traits** of moral behavior in every **text**. It asks: 'What do I learn here about prayer? Obedience? How to deal with self-pity? How to raise my children? How to conduct myself sexually? How to handle discouragement?' But if the purpose of every text is to point to God's saving purposes--then we must

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<sup>19</sup> Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*. (Eerdmans, 1999). p. 10.

approach every text asking: "what gospel-pieces are here? What does this text show us about how salvation works? what does it tell me of grace, faith, the nature of sin, the attributes of God as they bear on our relationship to him, the nature of conversion, the results or marks of conversion?" It is only if we do this first that we can then treat the moral-example aspect of the text properly.]

c. Third, it means *showing how the salvation 'pieces' only 'come together' eventually in Christ*. For example, we may point out that Elijah was of course very courageous on Mt. Camel--but he was only courageous because he knew about God's saving purposes. Unlike Baal and all the pagan gods, the true God did not need worshippers to cut themselves and compel his attention and answers to prayer through their efforts. He knew that with only a word of prayer, God would hear and answer. But this incident participates in the Big Plot-Line of salvation's story. It raises the question: "**why** would the true God be so utterly different than the gods of the world's religions? **why** would he listen to his prophet without him cutting himself or dancing furiously or providing a perfect moral performance? Why?" The only way the interpreter can answer this is to point ahead in the Scripture to how the plot-line resolves itself. It is because of Jesus who was cut literally to pieces for us and who made a perfect sacrifice for sins so that God can come to us and work with us despite our imperfections.

Note 1. Here then we get to the essence of the issue of 'moralism' and application. On the one hand you could so fear 'moralism' and put so much emphasis on the 'limitation' and partial nature of former ages of revelation that you read the text as nothing more than a 'type' of Christ. You may not allow any 'exemplary' force at all to the text to impinge on the listener. This is, however, to forget that every stage in revelation is a stage in redemption-history. Every part of the Bible tells us *something* about how God's salvation 'works'. We learn things about grace, repentance, faith, obedience in every era. On the other hand, 1) just as it is clear in the gospels that we are not simply supposed to imitate Christ's example but believe and rest in his work for us (which is the only way we ever *will* follow his example), and 2) just as it is clear in the epistles that our imperatives ('do this') are based on indicatives ('because you **are** this'), then 3) whenever we preach on any other character in the Bible we must only exhort people to 'be like' him/her on the basis of faith in the one to whom he/she points.

Note 2: We must not think that 'putting the text into the One Story Line' is something you only have to work on **with** Old Testament texts. It is just as possible to preach New Testament texts--even Gospel accounts about Jesus--without reference to the overall story line of salvation. It is extremely possible to simply show how much Jesus loves and forgives or how great he is, appealing directly to sentiment, without showing how the particular text points to the longitudinal themes of sin, justice, redemption, and his saving work. It is possible to lift up Jesus simply as an example to emulate. Another example: it is well known that often Paul lays out the 'doctrine' in **the** early part of his letters and 'practical application' in the latter part. (**This** is an oversimplification, but a relatively helpful one.) It is extremely easy to preach a sermon on Ephesians 4 about the 'Marks of a Healthy Church' without grounding it in the **Christology** of Eph I. The same could be said for preaching on 'Love' in 1 Cor 13 without grounding it in the dissension of the Corinthians and its doctrinal solution--the cross (1 Cor 1). In all such cases the preacher is giving listener the strong impression that what it will **take** to **have** a healthy church (or a loving life) is simple moral effort.

Note 3: We must not think that 'putting the text into the One Story Line' means that we have to identify one 'longitudinal theme' as **the** central, controlling theme of the Bible. Many people have tried to demonstrate this. The best candidate is probably the theme of the 'Mngdom' and a **close** second is 'covenant'.<sup>20</sup> Not only do most Biblical theologians disagree with this on **hermeneutical** grounds. I think it is pragmatically unwise. Every theme has its own nuances

<sup>20</sup> Goldsworthy makes a case for 'kingdom' in Preaching the Whole Bible, p. 51-52.

and if we choose one theme as the theme we tend to become unbalanced in our understanding of the gospel. We may over-stress the mystical or the legal or the individual or the corporate. (See chapter 3)

#### OBJECTIONS TO THE APPROACH

In light of the RHM approach, there are two opposite exegetical errors to avoid. Let's recall the words of Sidney Greidanus: "*We can define 'preaching Christ' as preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and teaching of Jesus Christ...*"<sup>21</sup>

**Moralizing.** If, on the one hand, we fail to relate the text to the saving work of Christ we fail **both hermeneutically** and pastorally. 1) *Hermeneutically*, we fail to truly reveal the meaning of the text. If every part of the Bible testifies to Christ, then until we discern how a text tells us about him we do not know what it really means. 2) *Pastorally*, we fail to truly guide the listeners into any real holiness. If they hear us, in isolation, simply telling them how to raise their children, face trials, pray fervently, or create a healthy church--we give them the (totally false) impression that they can be right with God and others through their own efforts.

**Allegorizing.** If, on the other hand we fail to "*authentically integrate*" the message of the text with the saving work of Christ, but rather only point out superficial likenesses between the text and Jesus ("As Rahab took shelter under the red cord, so we should take shelter under the blood of Christ")--we also fail hermeneutically and pastorally. 1) *Hermeneutically*, allegorizing is a 'quick fix' substituting for hard thinking about the meaning of the text. Allegorizing *either* can lead to doing too little work on the micro-context (you don't spend enough time penetrating to the author's original intent for his readers) *or* can lead to doing too little work on the macro-context (you will simply refer to superficial features rather than preaching the great 'longitudinal' Biblical-theological themes like temple, covenant, kingdom, substitution). 2) *Pastorally*, allegorizing has the same weaknesses. Too little emphasis on the micro-context leads to a lack of practical application. For example, if we jump to Christ' too soon we miss the exemplary value of the text. On the other hand, if we put too little emphasis on the macro-context and make the connection to Christ superficial, we end up with a moralistic sermon anyway. Allegorizing only arouses sentimental feelings. It does not confront self-righteous pride and self-righteous fear.

#### **The concern about allegorizing.**

While the proponents of RHM are very concerned about moralizing, its opponents think that the main danger (and main objection) to the RHM is the danger of allegorizing. An example that Sidney Greidanus uses is from Augustine.

*"The door [in the side of the ark] surely represents **the** wound **made** when the side of the crucified **was** pierced with the spear...This **is** the way of entrance for those who come to him..."* City of God 13.21

"**Allegorizing**" has two very bad effects. 1) It makes for completely arbitrary interpretation. Instead of living under the authority of the Word, we can get nearly any message from a text we wish. 2) It fails to honor the meaning and message of the human author, whose conscious intent is the vehicle for God's revelation. Modern interpreters, both of an orthodox and liberal bent, eschew allegorizing by concentrating wholly on the original intent of the human author as the only sure and certain benchmark. But there are dangers on the other extreme as well.

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<sup>21</sup> Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*. (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 10.

### *Remembering the Two Authors*

Rodney A. Whitacre<sup>22</sup> reiterates what we have just said about the two opposite errors in exegesis. but he bases each one in an incomplete doctrine of the Scripture. He writes that there have always been two basic emphases or approaches to Biblical interpretation. The first he calls this the 'Historic Approach' to Bible interpretation. This stresses the fact that each text has a very human author. This approach asks 'What did the human Biblical author intend to say? What did it mean to the original author and audience?' To discover this, the interpreter looks at the linguistic, literary, and historical evidence. But Whitacre also speaks of the 'Organic Approach' to Bible interpretation. This stresses the fact that all of Scripture has a divine author. This approach asks: 'What does the divine Biblical author intend for us to hear? Why did he put this in the Bible for us?' To discover this, the interpreter looks at all the Bible (especially texts that are most like and most unlike it) and at Jesus Christ, who (as we have seen) the overall message of the Bible is about.

a. The Extreme **Forms**. (1) At the extreme end of an 'Organic-Only' approach, we have wildly Allegorical Interpretation. Whitacre gives an example of this in a famous interpretation of Ps. 137:8-9 by the medieval church. "O daughter of Babylon...happy is *he*..who seizes your infants and *dashes* them against the rocks." The allegorical interpretation goes like this. Jesus is the Rock. Babylon represents evil and sin. So we are being told to take even our littlest sins and most embryonic sinful thoughts and dash them on Christ. This interpretation connects to other parts of the Bible (Christ as the Rock, the need for purity and holiness) but it makes no attempt to connect to the original historical meaning of the text. (2) At the other extreme of a 'Historic-Only' approach, we have most scholarship in the world today--the *Historical-Critical* Interpretation.. It makes no attempt to align or integrate what Paul says with what Isaiah says. There is no concept of any divine authorship or divine unity. Any attempt at harmonization is scorned and disdained. The meaning of the ancient texts is locked away, therefore, in a very ancient time, and has nothing to do with us directly. Any **normative** or systematic theology is impossible.

b. Moderate Forms. Within the mainstream of the evangelical world these two extremes are **rightly discarded**.<sup>23</sup> But a two more moderate forms of the two poles creates real confusion among orthodox students of the Bible today. (1) First, there is a moderate *Historical-Critical* approach which does allow for 'harmonization' with other texts for the purpose of Systematics, but is not comfortable with reading any meanings out of a text that the human author did not know of. Because this view believes in the divine authorship of the entire Bible, it will accept that an OT author was talking unwittingly about Jesus, but only when a NT author tells us that he was. (2) On the other hand, the Redemptive-Historical approach, which stresses more the organic unity of divine authorship, believes that many texts mean more than the human author intended. By the Holy Spirit's inspiration, an OT text may tell us about Jesus Christ and **we** may discover this, even if no NT author tells us so.

c. Criticisms. (1) Of the 'Redemptive-Historical' approach: First, there is a real danger of allegorizing. If you are not 'controlled' in your interpretation by first establishing the human author's intention, then your imagination can just run wild, and you can get anything out of it. Second, since you are always **trying** to 'find Christ' in the text, you may miss the very real practical applications and moral exhortations that are there. The people will get an inspiring picture of Jesus, but not get any real practical direction in how to live their lives. Third, it could be hard for your lay people to learn how to interpret the Bible **with** this method. When you **are** done, **they'll** say: My! I could never get all that out of a text." And they'll be right.

<sup>22</sup> Rodney A. Whitacre, 'Hearing God's Truth: A Beginner's Guide to Studying the Scriptures'. Available at the website of the Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. <http://www.tesm.edu/writings/whithear.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, the highly allegorical reading of the Bible is quite prevalent among lay people in all churches.

(2) But the criticisms of the 'Historical-Intent Only' approach are, I believe, more trenchant. First, as we mentioned above the New Testament writers continually interpret the Old Testament using the 'Organic' or "Redemptive-Historical" approach. They are constantly reading Psalms and other parts of the Bible as being about Christ. even when those texts have no clear 'Messianic Prophecy" in them. This was clearly a 'model' with which the NT writers were interpreting the OT. Why not use the model? The objection that 'they were inspired, we are not' assumes that no one else in the early church was reading the Old Testament in a thoroughly Christological way. But all indications are that they were.

Second. the historical approach often speaks of the Christo-centric approach being 'arbitrary', but it's own method is much more speculative than it seems to realize. Of course it is somewhat speculative to answer the question "what does this text tell us about Jesus?" when we know that the author didn't intend to tell us overtly about Jesus. But. on the other hand. it is somewhat speculative to try to reconstruct the original condition and historical setting as well. We are never sure we are right about the original audience. It takes a great deal of imagination and guess work to posit authorial intent. So the grammatico-historical exegesis is not as scientific and objective as it might first appear. Third, we must be able to preach Christ from a text. or we have the problem of 'synagogue' sermons. We are preaching the same sermon that could be preached in a synagogue—"Here is the righteous law. Do it and you will live." For example, how should we preach Jacob wrestling with the angel? There is no place where a New Testament writer sees this as a type of Christ. In the stricter view, then. we cannot preach this text as being about Christ at all. We must say that we learn here things like: a) life is filled with difficulty but we should persevere, or b) we need to wrestle with God in prayer. But that is what could have been preached centuries before Christ came. It is a sermon that would fit as well in a synagogue. Fourth. the 'Historical-Intent Only' approach implies that the Church was not able to interpret the Bible properly until very recently we had the historical tools to discern original settings.<sup>24</sup>

The Difference between a n "Allegory" and a "Type"

If then we see that a Christological reading of the Bible is a wise and right way to go--the biggest practical issue that comes us in this discussion is—how can you tell the difference between a "type" and an "allegory"? The Redemptive-Historical approach finds types of Christ in OT texts even where a NT writer does not indicate that there is one. How can you be sure you are not allegorizing? Based on the writings of Clowney and Rod Whitacre's paper. here is a summary of the difference.

a. Typology: (1) (Clowney) A type is based on something in the text of symbolic *significance* to the human author *and* in the Scriptures in general. There must be evidence that the author saw a feature or figure as having some significance of *symbolism*. For example. is the fact that the chord **Rahab** uses to mark and protect her home (Joshua 2) is scarlet significant to the author? Or does the color red symbolize blood or sacrifice in general in the Bible. If not (and I don't think we can demonstrate that it does), then we cannot preach that the chord represents the blood of Christ protecting us from justice and wrath--as some people have done. However, we can preach the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites that way (Exodus 12). Can we preach that God's choice of **Leah** as the mother of the Messianic seed is a type of God's salvation through weakness and rejection (Matt.1:1-17; 1 Cor. 1:26ff.)? We would have to demonstrate that the author of Genesis knew that **Judah** was the bearer of the Messianic strain and that therefore it's coming to **Leah** rather than Rachel was an act of grace. I believe we can (Gen.49:10). **Can** we preach that Isaac represents Christ? Yes, because in the Old Testament. the first-born had redemptive significance. Every first born belonged to God, etc.

<sup>24</sup> See Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* (Zondervan, 1984).

sure  
 etc  
 for a redemptive theme  
 (largely traditional)

(2) (Whitacre) A type is also based on connections between *macro features and figures*. It sees similarities between persons (prophets, priests, kings), events (Passover, exodus), and patterns of practice (saving through rejection, weakness). For example, in 2 Kings 5, we see a type of Christ's revelation in the exclusivity of the prophet Elisha. Naaman must go to Israel, and he must wash in the Jordan. Because the Lord's salvation is a revealed salvation, we must submit to that revelation. On the other hand, we see a type of Christ's salvation in the prominence of **the** servants. Naaman keeps going to kings, but God sends his salvation through the **weak** and marginal. He must go to a weaker country than Syria, he learns of his salvation through a servant girl who was victimized by his military, he only avoids disaster when his own servants reason with him to listen to **Elisha**. Because salvation comes through weakness and the powerless, we receive it by repentance/ faith alone and so refuse to worship worldly power and wealth. So types focus on 'macro-patterns' of revelation rather than descending to details.

b. Allegory: (1) Allegory, by contrast, seeks *no basis in the author's original intent*. Of course, it reads everything as symbolic, but it makes no attempt to show through linguistic or literary analysis that the feature it fixes on was of some symbolic significance to the human author. In other words, it ignores the human nature of the Bible and treats it as if it were simply a supernatural text. (2) Secondly, allegory focuses on *micro-features such as words or even numbers*. It may take the two coins that the Good Samaritan left with the innkeeper as the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, left by Jesus to sustain and heal us. It may take the 'little ones' of Ps.137:8-9 as our sinful thoughts or our 'little' white lies. Instead of seeking to identify broad patterns of salvation with Jesus' pattern, it fixes on details.

## Appendix #1

### Historic and Organic: An Outline of Positions

#### "Historical-Critical/Liberal"

I interpret the human Biblical author's original meaning without alignment with meaning of the other human Biblical authors."

## Historical

'What does the *human* author mean?'

#### "Historical-Critical/Evangelical"

I interpret the human Biblical author's original meaning in alignment with other human authors. But I do not look for meanings in the text that the human author did not put there."

*Typology only if **the New Testament tells me**.*

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#### "Redemptive-Historical"

I interpret the human Biblical author's original meaning not only in alignment with other human authors. I also look for meanings that the divine author may have put there that the human author did not."

*Typology based on Symbolic significance.*

## Organic

'What does the *divine* author mean?'

#### "Allegorical"

I interpret the Biblical text without much regard for the human Biblical author's original meaning. I use it to confirm or illustrate other texts in the Bible.

## BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF THE APPROACH

### *Two Basic Theological Frameworks'*

Richard Lints, in *The Fabric of Theology* (Eerdmans, 1993) points out that what we have been calling 'Redemption-Historical' exegesis is more than just a way to interpret texts. He believes that one very significant difference among evangelicals lies between those who organize doctrines into a 'redemptive historical' framework and those who organize doctrines along the lines of a 'systematic-topical' framework. (See pp.259-290). The first framework (which he connects with the names of Vos, Kline, and Gaffin) sees the basic theological structure of Scripture as a series of historical epochs in which God progressively reveals more and more of his redemptive purposes in Christ through successive covenants (Creation. Abrahamic. Mosaic. Christ-inaugurated. Christ-consummated). The second framework (which he connects with the names of Hodge, Berkhof, and Erickson) sees the basic framework of Scripture as a series of logical categories or subject headings around which the varied texts of Scriptures are organized to produce doctrines (God, Man, Christ, Justification, Sanctification. Glorification).

What is the difference? The traditional teaching of the Reformed seminaries over the last 40 years has been basically correct--the RHM and STM are 'symbiotically related'. On the one hand, the systematics-student should study every Biblical text in its redemptive-historical context before doing topical-synthesis. Many conventional systematic-topics can be taken up and given new life through Biblical-theological treatment. For example, Harvie Conn did a Biblical-theological study of 'church growth', tracing the theme of 'multiplication' from the creation mandate through the whole Bible.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, if the RHM resists Systematic Theology too much we may not really have a unified Bible. We have to be able to answer the question: what is the authoritative Biblical teaching on this subject?

Having said that, the two approaches, practically speaking, tend to produce two somewhat different 'mindsets' when it comes to reading the Scripture. Lints argues that the redemptive-historical model (RHM) is better than the systematic-topical model (STM) for thinking about the Bible. John Murray speaks of the 'tendency to abstraction' of the STM, the tendency to dehistoricize, and to arrive at 'timeless', topically oriented universals. ("Systematic Theology" in *The New Testament Student and Theology*, J.H.Skilton, ed. P&R, 1976). RHM, on the other hand focuses on God's special revelation not primarily as 'naked information' but primarily as God's activity in history. But if this is true, then these different approaches will effect preaching and ministry in general.

### *Theological Frameworks Compared*

a. The RHM gives us a dynamic view of our place in redemptive history. The RHM tells that we **are** now in a particular period of redemptive history (between the first and second coming of Christ). This is the period of the '*already-but-not-yet*' of the kingdom of God, which sets us apart from the epoch previous to and following this one. The STM model has little concept of the all-pervasiveness of the kingdom of God. It tends to see the kingdom mainly in terms of one of the traditional '**millennial**' positions.

The massive importance of the '**already-but-not-yet-kingdom**' for both faith and practice is largely missed by those steeped in the STM approach. It tends to think of Biblical truth in a-historical categories of doctrine which we now have to 'apply' to our lives today. It tends to rely mainly on 'correctness' or technique ("5 principles for overcoming worry"). The RHM avoids over optimism or pessimism or legalism by focusing always on the dynamic kingdom-epoch lifestyle we live out now. The City of God and the City of Man are present realities. Christ as died, risen, and ascended has put us in a *particular, current, dynamic* relationship to God, our

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<sup>25</sup> See first chapters in Harvie Conn, ed. *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977).



sin, our past, the Spirit, the world, and to the assembly of heaven itself. It tells us about this new relationship and status we have now, and how to live it out as the people of God in this entire epoch. This is a far more "organic" way to think out Christianity.

John Stott, in a very interesting and easy-to-understand chapter called "The Now and the Not Yet" in *The Contemporary Christian* (IVP, 1992) shows what a powerful effect this theological category has on our practice. This understanding of our place in redemptive history keeps us from fundamentalism (the 'not yet Christians'), Pentecostalism (the 'already' Christians), and Liberalism (in some ways too 'not yet' and in other ways too 'already'). It keeps us from over- or under-discipline, from over- or under-emphasis on evangelism or social concern, from over-optimism or under-optimism about revival, and so on. A-historical (STM) understandings of the Bible lead constantly to these extremes. By the way, Jonathan Edwards noted these same three enemies of true revival--Dead orthodoxy, Enthusiasm, and Heterodoxy.

b. The RHM gives us a more Biblical and less 'western' framework. Harvie Conn in *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds* (Zondervan, 1984) points out that the highly rational, scientific approach of STM is difficult for people of non-Western cultures to enjoy or grasp. Many are now pointing out that many of the formulators of STM were unwittingly shaped and affected by the Enlightenment, its detached rationality and its mistrust of history. Harvie (and Rick) note that the RHM gives much more weight to the fact that the Bible is filled with narrative. The gospel itself is a true story, not a set of "principles" or "laws". The STM approach has 'de-storied' the gospel. Harvie also points out that RHM understands that all God's truth is covenantal truth, never abstract from history and life. (See pp.225-234). Thus preaching and teaching from the RHM tends to be much less pietistic and abstract from life. All of this means that RHM is a vastly better vehicle for spreading the gospel through and to all people groups.

c. The RHM gives us a more corporate and less individualistic approach to ministry. The RHM understands that the goal of salvation history is not simply a 'right relationship' with God and live in heaven forever. The goal of redemption is really 're-creation'^ God's saving purposes culminate in a new creation, not a disembodied eternal state. The gospel is not that we get to escape earth into heaven, but that heaven is "comes down" to transform the earth. The church, then, is not simply an aggregation of people who help one another find God, but it is called to be in this world a sign of the coming new creation. We are to embody the 'new humanity that Christ is creating.

All of this drastically undermines the pietistic, individualistic, privatistic Christianity that can be the result of the STM approach. While the STM approach points us more to how we as individuals get peace with God and 'live right', the RHM framework calls us to live our lives out as a 'counter-culture', a new nation, in which our business practices, race relations, artistic expressions, family life, etc., show the world what humanity could be like under the Lordship of Christ. And the RHM emphasis on 'new creation' calls us to be concerned for the social and material world, since God's ultimate salvation will not only redeem the soul but the body and the physical world as well.

d. The RHM gives a much more relevant approach to 'post-modern' times. This point is closely connected to the previous one. "Post-modern" times are characterized by a rejection of the Enlightenment worship of rationality and technique, and is much more devoted to narrative and story as ways to find meaning. Also, post-modernity rejects the Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual and stresses the importance of community. As we have just seen, the RHM shows us all those resources in Biblical theology that the STM approach has tended to overlook. It breaks the Bible into stages of a Story--the story of Jesus and his salvation--while the STM breaks the Bible into logical categories. More than that, the RHM actually puts us into the story, showing us our place and stage in the unfolding of the kingdom of God. The RHM approach also shows concern for the regeneration of human community and even the

physical environment, not just individual, interior happiness. In all these ways, RHM is much more relevant to post-modern sensibilities.

e. The RHM gives us a more Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. The RHM sees the purpose of each epoch of redemptive history as being the progressive revealing of Christ. God could have poured our judgment on mankind in the Garden, therefore the only reason there is any history is because God has purposed to send his Son into the world. to pour out judgment on him and thereby bring salvation. Jesus is the only reason there is human history. and therefore he is goal of human history. Thus everything God says and does in history explain and prepare for the salvation of his Son. The STM, on the other hand, will examine the Law, the prophets, and history of Abraham, Moses, David, etc. for information about the various doctrinal topics--what we learn about how to live, what to believe. But the RHM sees every story and law and piece of wisdom literature as pointing to Christ and his work. Preaching and teaching from an STM framework tends to be much more moralistic and legalistic.

f. The RHM gives us a more organic way of reading Biblical texts. The RHM works **at** understanding the differences between stages in redemptive history, while the STM largely ignores such study. But many disputes over the application of the Old Testament laws are really based on a lack of understanding of the role which the Mosaic regulations played in that time in redemptive history (i.e. how they helped us look to and prepare for God's coming salvation) and of how that role is fulfilled in Christ.

Maybe even more fundamentally, the RHM really leads us to see the very purpose of each Biblical passage differently. We have said that RHM understands God's revelation never comes in the form of textbook type information. but in the form of covenant. Why? Because the purpose of God's truth is never to merely inform. but to know God in a relationship of love and service. For example, if we read Genesis 1-2 with an STM mind-set, expecting "naked information" about how the world was created, we will see it differently than those who read with a RHM mind-set, expecting knowledge of who are Creator is and how we are to relate to him and to his creation.

Concluding Note: Do not read the above as pitting Systematic Theology per se against 'Biblical Theology'. There have been many proponents of the Redemptive-Historical approach that virtually deny the ability to do coherent Systematics at all. This is going too far by far. and such a denial ultimately undermines the concept of a single divine author of the whole Bible.

## EXPOUNDING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 2 -

## HOW? A CHRISTO-CENTRIC FOCUS

### INTRODUCTION

For theological, pastoral, and missiological reasons we should read the Bible as 'Redemption History' and not simply as a body of spiritual and moral information. This means that every part and text of the Bible is part of the 'Big Story' of salvation and attests to God's saving purposes which climax in Jesus Christ. Therefore, every text is 'really about Jesus'. But how do we 'get to Christ'. practically speaking, when preaching a text that is not directly about Jesus? How can we actually read each text 'Christologically', with a Christo-centric focus?

The preacher feels this most acutely when preaching from the 3/4 of the Bible called the 'Old Testament'. When most people think of "Preaching Christ" from a such a text. they think of doing so by typology. They look in the text for a 'type' of Christ within it. So, for example. we might preach Isaac as a type of the sacrificed son, or David as the type of the warrior-savior, and so on. This practice (as we have seen) is still somewhat controversial. but even if it were granted it would not suffice. Most texts of the Bible do not provide a classic 'type' of Jesus. The vast majority of psalms are not clear and consensus 'Messianic' psalms, for example. So in order to 'get to Christ' preachers may very lamely and artificially tack him on to the end of the sermon (e.g. 'You shouldn't lie, but if you do, through Jesus you can be forgiven.") Or they force him in through finding superficial similarities, which really boil down to allegorizing.

But it is important to see how many different ways there are to 'preach Christ' besides direct typology. Sidney Greidanus lays out a number of 'ways' to preach Christ besides typology in his book *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*<sup>26</sup>. Goldsworthy too writes:

'The essence of typology is the recognition that within Scripture itself certain events, people, and institutions in biblical history bear a particular relationship to later events, people, or institutions. The relationship is such that the earlier foreshadows the later, and the later fills out or completes the earlier....[But] I want to suggest that behind the technical uses [of the term 'typology'], there is a principle that is far-reaching in its application. We may refer to this as macro-typology because it indicates that we are not dealing mainly with scattered examples but with a broad pattern...The typological correspondence is not simply between persons, events, and institution. but between whole epochs of revelation...."<sup>27</sup>

Center the church on Christ

What does Goldsworthy mean? I believe he means something like the following. (Note: I acknowledge both Goldsworthy and Greidanus' works as the basis for my following summaries and categories:

### PREACHING CHRIST - BY INTERPRETIVE: METHOD

One way to prepare to preach **with** a Christ-centered focus is to ways to identify gospel 'pieces' that only Christ can resolve (themes), receive (law).complete (stories). or fulfill (symbols). If I were you I would create my own collection of ways to preach Christ in these ways from:

<sup>26</sup> See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 203ff. Greidanus lists the following 'Ways' from Old Testament Passages to Christ: a) Redemptive-Historical Progression. b) Promise-Fulfillment. c) Typology, d) Analogy, e) Longitudinal Themes, f) NT References, g) Contrast.

<sup>27</sup> Goldsworthy. *Preaching the Whole Bible*. p. 77 and 111.

- E. Clowney *The Unfolding Mystery* (Presbyterian and Reformed)
- S. DeGraaf *Promise and Deliverance* (Four Volumes-Presbyterian and Reformed.)  
Carson is editing a series of books on these intercanonical themes.<sup>28</sup>  
Alec Motyer's *Look to the Rock* chooses seven of these redemptive themes and shows how Christ is the fulfillment of each.  
See the last section of each chapter in Longman and Dillard's *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1994)
- See Christopher J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (IVP, 1992)

#### A. BY THEME RESOLUTION. Only Jesus resolves redemptive themes.

There are quite a number of what Don Carson calls 'inter-canonical' themes that 'cut across' the entire Biblical corpus. Alec Motyer points out that the Old Testament asserts truths in apparently unreconcilable tension with each other. Thus these themes have 'thickening plots' as the Old Testament goes on. In other words, like all good stories, there is dramatic tension within the theme that seems almost insoluble. Only in Christ, however, are the 'tensions' in these themes resolved and fulfilled. With this approach, rather than only looking for 'types' we should look for the questions the text raises to which only Jesus can be 'the answer in the back of the book'. If you find any of the following themes threading through your text (and this is not an exhaustive list) you can simply 'pull on the thread', looking back to where it began and ahead to its fulfillment in Christ now and on the Last Day.

Notice how these themes are not just 'moral principles'

(justice, honesty, love, generosity, family loyalty, etc)

but 'gospel pieces'

(the attributes of God that supply salvation, the condition of humanity that requires salvation, the patterns of salvation provision, the means of salvation reception, etc)

#### BROAD THEMES RESOLVED IN CHRIST

1. Theme of King and Kingdom. The freedom and glory of God's kingdom is 'lost' when Adam and Eve sin. The search for a true 'judge' and king absorbs much of the history of God's people. The people continually fall away from submission to the rule of God and instead become slaves to their own desires or other nations which oppress and enslave. Both the successes and failures of all Israel's leaders point to the need for a true King. But eventually the tension between the brokenness and depth of sin and the requisite power of the Liberator-King becomes overwhelming. Though Moses leads the exodus out of the land of bondage, he fails to obey God at the Rock. Though David Goliath, he sins against Uriah. No human king is enough. The expectations of a perfect King come to fruition in **Isaiah** and the Psalms to such a high degree that only the coming of the Lord himself can fulfill them. Question: "how can any king be powerful enough to liberate us from slavery and bondage *this* great?" The answer: only one who is God himself.

2. Theme of Grace and Law in the **Covenant**. A second major theme of the Bible is how the holiness and love of God relate in the covenant. God is absolutely holy and also merciful. But how can he be both? Ray Dillard says that the histories of Judges through 2 Chronicles seem caught on the dilemma of whether God's covenant with his people is conditional (conditioned on obedience) or unconditional (by sheer grace). Thus the narratives are mainly propelled by the tension of the question: "how can God be holy and still remain faithful to his people?" The answer: only in the cross, where both the law of God and the love of God was fulfilled. Dillard insists that we must **not** try to resolve this tension until we get to the cross. Isaiah points to a 'resolution' when he speaks of the need for both a High King and a Suffering Servant, but even he is essentially creating just more 'dramatic' tension that only Christ can resolve.

<sup>28</sup> They are called *New Studies* in *Biblical Theology*, put out under the 'Apollos' imprint of IVP in the United Kingdom, and soon to be put out by IVP in this country.

3. *Theme of Creation, Fall, and Re-creation (Resurrection).* As the Kingdom theme shows us the need for a Liberator from bondage and the covenant theme the need for a Redeemer from the penalty of the Law so the theme of creation-and-consummation points to our need for a Healer who is Life itself. Death brings decay and disintegration to all God's good creation. Life is filled with grief and loss. Society is a Babel. Even the people of God are in a kind of indefinite 'exile'. We are alienated from our God, our true selves, one another, and from the creational environment. **The question:** "how can the creation be saved and healed? how can we be liberated from death and decay?" **Answer:** only if the one who created us returns to renew us at last. Only by the one who defeats death through the resurrection. He will reconcile 'all things' (Col. 1:16-20) and make the world into the Garden of God. (Rev. 21:1-8)

4. *Theme of the True God vs. Idols.* The first two commandments in the Decalogue take up one of the pre-dominant themes of the Bible--the difference between the true God and idols. Any and every created thing is good in itself but can have demonic, destructive influence if it is promoted to an ultimate, god-like place in any heart, society, or culture. Idolatry becomes the ultimate definition of sin. because it is possible to be almost completely compliant with the behavioral law and yet be obeying out of idolatrous motives (e.g. works righteousness, racial-cultural pride, lust for social status) rather than God. All psychological and social pathologies can be traced to inordinate loves (Augustine, Luther). **Question:** "How can a disordered psyche or society be renovated and made healthy?" **Answer:** only by a Savior who is an absolute Beauty. Rules and doctrines alone will not suffice. since the root of all sin and disorder is 'having other gods before me'. We need One who is not just a king/liberator, not just one who is a righteous Law-fulfiller. not just a death-healer. but a Beauty that can capture our hearts. "Unto you who believe he is precious" (1 Peter).

NARROWER THEMES RESOLVED IN CHRIST (just some!)

5. *Worship and the Sanctuary.* ("Felt Need") Question: How can we connect to the presence of God? The Presence was lost through sin. It dwells amidst of the people in the tabernacle, but in Christ. God's glory becomes something we 'behold' (John 1:14), and now the presence of God is actually within us (1 Peter 2). Some day, the light and presence of God will fill the earth. Jesus is the Beauty we must adore to live. Trace through the Bible the history of face-to-face encounters with God's presence--Gen 15. 18 (Abraham's) Gen 28. 32 (Jacob's) Exodus 3, 33 (Moses') Joshua 5 (Joshua's) Judges 13 (Samson's parents) 1 Kings 19 (Elijah) Isaiah 6 (Isaiah's).

6. *Righteousness and Nakedness.* ("Felt Need") Question: How can we be free of shame and condemnation? We were originally righteous and right with God--naked and unashamed. Jesus however is the perfectly obedient Son, clothing us in a robe of his own righteousness and lead us boldly and unashamedly before the throne. Trace through the Bible the concept of shame and guilt from Genesis 3 through the Psalms and Isaiah 6 through the prophets to the New Testament.

7. *Marriage and Faithfulness.* ("Felt Need") Question: How can we know love and intimacy? God depicts his relationship with this people as the relationship of a husband to an unfaithful wife. Jesus however, is the true bridegroom who sacrificially loves his spouse, wins her love, and presents her to himself a radiant bride. Trace through the Bible this theme from Genesis 2 throughout the prophets (Ezek 16, Hosea) to John 1 and Ephesians 5.

8. *Image and Likeness.* ("Felt Need") Question: How can we become fully human beings? God made us in his 'image and likeness', but that likeness has been defaced in us, though not lost. In Christ and his incarnation. we have the perfect picture both of who God is (in terms we can literally grasp) and also of who we are meant to be. Through Christ the image of God is restored in us.

9. *Rest and Sabbath*. ("Felt Need") Question: How can we find harmony with ourselves and those around us? We were originally called into the 'rest', the *shalom* of God, but now we are deeply restless. The Sabbath points to the rest from our physical work that we need. More profoundly, Christ brings us the spiritual rest from our good works (Hebrews 4). Finally, we will have the ultimate rest in the City of God.

10. *Wisdom and the Word*. ("Felt Need") Question: How can we know the truth, especially the reason for our existence? We were created for a purpose, but now we experience meaninglessness. We do not have the wisdom to direct our steps. But in Christ we have not only the master teacher of the Word, but the Word, the Logos himself, who is the one we should live for, our meaning in life.

11. *Justice and Judgement*. ("Felt Need") Question: If there is no ultimate judge, what hope is there for the world, so filled with tyranny and injustice, **but** if there is an ultimate judge, what hope is there for us, who have done so much wrong? (I.e. How can the Word of God be life-giving blessing and not just a curse?) Answer--only in Christ is there hope, for he is the Judge who took our Judgement, so God can be both Just and Justifier of those who believe.

#### THEME PROGRESSION TOWARD CHRIST.

The preacher must put the text into the 'flow' of God's salvation history, because all of these themes build to resolution only progressively. God establishes his world in creation, but through the Fall, nearly all is lost. Then God begins to re-establish (kingdom, sanctuary, Word, rest, covenant) with the patriarchs, then under Moses, then during the time of the Prophets. After this, all these themes flame into new brightness in Christ himself. Now God is working them out in the era of the church and will bring them to finality on the last day. Therefore, the theme of R-H progress cuts across all other themes. It is usually important to make some reference to the whole history. For example, when preaching about the Psalmist's desire to go to the sanctuary, we should not simply exhort our people to enjoy worship. Rather we should say, 'now we are the temple (1 Pet. 2:4-5) because Jesus is the temple (John 2:13ff.) How much more available must the Lord be now for rich communion?' You can always trace each of these 'broad' or 'narrow' themes through their progressive unfolding.

Many of the 'inter-canonical themes' have explicit Old Testament promises attached to them. From the 'mother promise' of Gen. 3:15 down, Jesus is the fulfillment of them all. Move from the promise (implicit or explicit) in your text down to its fulfillment in Jesus. Or, if you are preaching a text from the New Testament, show the history of the longings and promises that are the background to what is asserted. This gives 'depth' and 'story' to the rather abstract pronouncements of the epistles, especially.

**B. BY LAW-RECEPTION.** Only Jesus lets us truly receive the law's requirements. A second major way to 'get to Christ' is to take the "Law Listening" approach. This is based on the idea of Paul in Galatians 3:24 that the Law is ultimately meant to "lead us to **Christ**".

In **this** approach, we take one of the many ethical principles and examples of the Bible--from the wisdom literature or the Old Testament law or even from a New Testament epistle--and truly 'listen' to it. These ethical principles are extremely searching and profound, and if we listen to them honestly and thoroughly, we will see that it is simply impossible to keep them! In Christ-centered preaching we argue that we have not truly 'listened' to the full weight of the rule till we see that God will have to a) provide some kind of remarkably thorough forgiveness for us and/or b) find some powerful way to fulfill this ethical principle for us and in us--because we are completely incapable of doing **so**.

**Bryan Chapell** is getting at this when he says that even if a text is not directly describing **Christ** it often points us to him when we ask: "**what** does **this** text **reveal** about human beings **that**

requires Christ's redemptive work?<sup>29</sup> Every ethical or exemplary text points us to Christ--and not primarily as an example but as a *Savior*. Every ethical text shows us our need for some kind of huge salvation and something of the shape that it must take.

Therefore, ultimately, Jesus is the only way to truly take the law seriously--he is the only way to truly receive it. The law *does* demand that we be perfectly holy. So we are not really listening to the law if we think we can obey it! The law is saying, in effect, 'you can never fulfill me--you need a savior!' (Galatians 3 and 4) So there are two ways we can only 'receive' the law with Jesus: 1) First, only if we know we are saved by faith can we have the strength to actually hear how extensive and searching and deep the demands of the law are. If we don't believe in the gospel of sheer grace we will have to find some way of whittling down the full requirements of any given law text. If we know we are saved by Jesus' finished work already then we have the guts to face the high demands of the law. ~~2) Second,~~ only if we know we are saved by the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us are we able to take the law seriously. The gospel alone admits that God demands perfection--nothing less--and he gets it in Christ.

What then do we actually exhort the people to do in our preaching? The "Law Listening" approach does not say: "well, then you don't really have to obey--after all, nobody's perfect!" Instead, we show that we **will** not be truly freed and able to obey this principle until *just* we see that Jesus fulfilled it for us. This ties directly into Application Strategy "A. *Critique Both Religion and Irreligion!*". Look there for more details.

- 2) But it is important to see that we do not need to find a 'type' or even an 'inter-canonical theme' in order to preach Christ from the text. It is not simply that Jesus Christ fulfills the requirements of the law on our behalf so we are not condemned by it. It is not even only that he exemplifies obedience to the law so that we might have a model for holy living. But since all human history only has happened because of Jesus (Gen.3:15) and since we are created in his image, institutions like marriage, work, family, and community were designed to reflect him. In other words, it is not just that our relationship with Jesus is like a good marriage, but marriage itself was invented to show us what our relationship with Jesus is to be like.



Therefore, We can't explain why we "shall not steal" unless we look at Jesus' ultimate generosity, who "*thought it not robbery*" to remain in heaven but gave it away, who "*though rich became poor for your sakes*". We can't explain why we "shall not commit adultery" unless we look at the faithfulness and (properly!) "jealous" love Jesus has shown to us on the cross. His -jealous" love does not only define sexual fidelity, but it gives us the only sufficient motive and power to practice it ourselves. Jesus is not simply the ultimate example, but as the fulfiller of the principles for us at infinite cost to himself, he changes the inner dynamics of our hearts so we can desire and long to be like him.]

### C. BY STORY-COMPLETION. Only Jesus completes the great stories of the Bible.

A third way to 'get to Christ' is to take the micro-story line of your text and connect it to the Bible's 'macro' story line: God is intervening into the history of a rebellious human race, by calling out and forming a new humanity, through actions that climax in the death and resurrection of Christ, and which lead to the judgment and renewal of the entire creation. There are two basic kinds of story-lines to be connected to the Christ-story line. (Much of the following is what is traditionally called 'typology'. but it is under letter D below that we examine classic typology.)

#### 1. Individuals' story-lines.

All the individual stories point us to Jesus, as we locate them in the history of redemption (often with the direct help of the New Testament writers, often not.) Jesus is the true and better Adam who *passed* the temptation test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to

<sup>29</sup> "A Seminar for Communicating the Grace of All Scripture" by Bryan Chapell. Unpublished handout.

us (1 Cor 15). Jesus is the true Abel who though innocently slain has blood that cries out for our acquittal, not our condemnation (Heb 12:24). Jesus is the true Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all the familiar and go out into the void "not knowing whither he went!" Jesus is the true "Isaac" who is the son of the laughter of grace who was offered up for us all. He is the true Jacob, who wrestled with God and took the blow of justice we deserved so we like Jacob only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up. He is the true Joseph, who at the right hand of the king forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them. Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant (Heb.3). He is the true Rock of Moses who, struck with the rod of God's justice, now gives us water in the desert. He is the true Joshua who is the general of the Lord's army. He is the true and better Job--the only innocent sufferer who then intercedes for his friends (Job 42). Jesus is the better Samson, whose death accomplishes so much good (Judges 16:31). He is the true David, whose victory becomes his people's victory though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves. Jesus is the true "Teacher" (Ecclesiastes) who may lead us through despair to help us find God. He is the true Jonah who went into the belly of the earth and so the people could be saved.

## 2. Corporate story-lines.

It is not simply the stories of individuals that point us to Christ. The redemptive purpose of God (easier to see in the RHM than the STM!) is to redeem a *people* and renew *creation*. Therefore, the major events in the history of the formation of the people of God also point us to Christ. Jesus is the one through whom all people are created. (John 1). Thus the creation story itself points forward to the new creation in Christ. Jesus is the one who went through temptation and probation in the wilderness. Thus the story of the Fall points forward to the successful probation and active obedience of Christ. Thus the exodus story points forward to the true exodus Jesus led for his people through his death (Luke 9:31). He led them not just out of economic and political bondage, but out of bondage to sin and death itself. Thus the wandering in the wilderness and the exile to Babylon points forward to Jesus' 'homelessness' and wandering and wilderness temptation and his suffering as the scapegoat outside the gate. He underwent the ultimate exile which fulfilled the righteousness of God fully.

Jesus is very literally the true Israel, the Seed (Gal.3:16-17). He is the only one who is faithful to the covenant. He is a remnant of one. He fulfills all the obligations of the covenant, and earns the blessings of the covenant for all who believe. When Hosea talks about the exodus of Israel from Egypt, he says, '*Out of Egypt I have called my son*' (Hos.11:1). Hosea calls **all** of Israel my son". But Matthew quotes this verse referring to Jesus (Matt.2:15) because Jesus is the true Israel. As we have seen above, just as Israel was in bondage in Egypt but was saved by the mighty redemptive actions of God in history, so Jesus leads the new people of God out of bondage to sin through the mighty redemptive actions of God in history (his death and resurrection).

## 3. Grace-Pattern story-lines.

**Another** kind of 'typology' that is often overlooked is *narrative* pattern of life-through-death or triumph-through-weakness pattern which is so often how God works in history and in our lives. (These are not so much 'gospel pieces' as 'gospel patterns'.) Notice how everyone **with** power and worldly status in the story of Naaman is clueless about salvation, while all the servants and underlings show wisdom. This is a major pattern in the Bible, a gospel-pattern, a grace event or a grace 'story-line' Move from the grace-event to the work Christ. For example, few have considered either Esther or Ruth to be a 'type' of Christ, and yet, in order to redeem the people they love, they must risk loss and do many things that mirror how Christ brought salvation to us. Another, important Grace-event typology is the 'order' of the Exodus and the Law-giving. God did not first give the law and then deliver the people. First he delivered the people and then he gave them the Law. Thus we **are** not saved by the Law, but saved *for* the Law. The Law is how we regulate our love-relationship with God, not the way we merit the relationship. We are saved by faith in Christ.



By the way, Sidney Greidanus does not like to call this 'typology' at all, and prefers to call this 'preaching Christ by analogy'.<sup>30</sup> *ok, whatever.*

It is especially important to see the importance of tying even the narrative actions of Christ to his own work. Why can Jesus be so accepting of outcasts and sinners? Is it because he is simply a 'tolerant person'? No--it is only because he paid the penalty for them on the cross. If we preach his examples of loving acceptance without tying them to the pattern of the cross, we are simply 'moralizing'. We are simply telling people, "be accepting and tolerant of others."

#### D. BY SYMBOL-FULFILLMENT

We briefly mentioned above how to determine if a particular feature in a text has symbolic significance for the author. In general, if a feature has symbolic significance for the author (symbolizing God's saving activity in some way) then it may be seen as a type of Christ, even if the author does not evidently have Christ consciously in mind. This is an area where abuse is quite possible. For example, does the Eve's creation out of the side of Adam symbolize our redemption out of the wounding of Christ's side in his execution?<sup>30</sup> Unlikely. Nevertheless, we assert that symbolism-typology is quite important in the Bible and here are some ways symbols function.

1. *Major Figure Typology and Symbols.* All the major figures and leaders of the Scriptures are point us to Christ, who is the ultimate leader who calls out and forms a people for God. Every anointed leader--every prophet, priest, king, judge who brings about 'salvation' or deliverance or redemption of any kind or level--is each a pointer to Christ, both in their strengths and even in their flaws. Even the flaws shows that God works by grace and uses what the world sees as marginal and weak. The 'outsiders' who God uses, especially those in the line of the promised 'seed', point to him (cf. Matt. 1:1-11). He is the fulfillment of the history of the judges who show that God can save not only by many, or by few, but by one. Jesus is the judge **all** the judges points to (since he really administers justice), the prophet all the prophets point to (since he really shows us the truth), the priests all the priests point to (since he really brings us to God), and the King of kings.

2. *Non-Personal Salvation Typology and Symbols.* Trace the 'salvation-by-grace' symbols out to their **fulfillment** in Christ. The bronze snake, the water of life from the smitten rock point to Christ, of course (since John and Paul tell us they do!) But especially the entire *sacrificial and temple system* is really pointing to him. Absolutely everything about the ceremonial system--from the clean laws to the altar, the sacrifices, and the temple itself--are pointing to him. The Sabbath and the Jubilee point to him. He makes them all obsolete. Jesus is the sacrifice all the sacrifices point to (Hebrews 10). Jesus is the bread on the altar in the temple (John 6), the light stand in the Holy Place (John 8), and the temple itself (John 2). for he is the presence of God **with** us. Jesus is fulfills **all** the ceremonial clean laws about foods and ritual purification (Acts 10 and 11). Jesus fulfills circumcision--it represents how he was cut off from God. Now we are clean in him. (Col. 2:10-11) Jesus is the Passover lamb (I Cor. 5:7)

T. Longman

#### E. BY WAY OF CONTRAST.

This is not so much a fifth 'way' to preach Christ as another aspect of using 'Story Insertion' and 'Symbol-fulfillment'.

Sidney Greidanus is helpful when he reminds us that we do not need a *good* example in our text in order to 'get to Christ'. When we say Christ is the completion or fulfillment of every text, that means that he is not only a *comparison* but a *contrast* to every text. Christ is a better

<sup>30</sup> Example from Greidanus, p. 37.

David, Samson, and Moses--so we don't have to apologize for their flaws. Their flaws show us Christ by way of contrast.]

Or look at the cries for justice in the Psalms. In one sense, Christ validates those cries--human injustice is serious! It *does* have to be paid for--it cannot simply be shrugged off or covered over. See--it takes the cross of Christ to reveal just how justified these cries for retribution are! But in another sense, it takes Jesus' atonement on the cross to lead us to think of ourselves differently than David (or the other Psalmists did). His death for us vividly shows us that we all deserve condemnation and it also shows us that the ultimate price for the sin (of our enemies) has been paid. Therefore we do not seek simple defense and justice but not vengeance or personal retribution. We are to pray for our enemies, as Jesus did. Jesus is thus a 'better Psalmist' and so the Psalmist points us to him by their limitations (in their stage in redemption history).

### PREACHING CHRIST - IN EACH BIBLICAL GENRE and EPOCH

Another way to prepare to preach with a Christ-centered focus is to study the way that particular genres and epochs of Biblical literature reveal Christ.

<i>Epoch</i>	<i>Genre</i>
Pre-Abrahamic Patriarchal	OT narrative
Moses/Joshua	OT narrative Law
Judges to David	OT narrative Wisdom Psalms
David to Jesus	OT narrative Prophets
Ministry of Jesus	NT narrative NT Discourse (Teaching/parables)
Early Church	NT narrative (Acts) Epistles
Apocalyptic	Daniel, Revelation, Olivet Discourse

In each genre or epoch there are particular ways in which the themes mentioned above take shape and point to Christ. If I were you I would create my own outline or 'stash' of ways and means to preach each kind of literature by consulting following sources:

- The 12 part tape-course "Preaching Christ in the Old Testament" by Edmund Clowney available from **Westminster** Seminary Media.
- The 8 chapters in Graeme Goldsworthy's book *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*.
- The new emerging series "The Gospel According to the Old Testament" by Presbyterian and Reformed. See for example T.Longman's *Immanuel in our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* and R.Dillard's *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah and Elisha*

## PREACHING CHRIST - OT NARRATIVE CASE STUDIES

### *Notes on Method:*

1. It is theologically right to anchor every way of preaching Christ both in the history of redemption and in the incomplete condition of the listeners. (I will call the incomplete condition a 'felt need' below.) Paul says that his purpose every time he proclaims Christ is to complete people (Col 1:28), then we can say that every facet of the person and work of Christ must correspond to some facet of our fallenness or incompleteness. As the older divines used to put it, "he is an eminently suitable Savior". Bryan Chapell consistently makes this point in his training. He calls this the 'Fallen Condition Focus'. It always works both ways. From any direct depiction of a human failing, lack, or incompleteness we can infer some aspect of Christ's saving work. On the other hand from any direct depiction of Christ's person or work we can infer some lack or need us. Unless we do both, our preaching will either be 1) abstract--a) academically so (eg "this represents the return from the exile of the people of God") or b) sentimentally so (eg "this shows how loving God is to us") OR 2) moralistic--without the moral imperative put into the bigger context of God's grace and provision and therefore our motivation and safety in doing it. If we don't ground the theme in the history of redemption (with reference to the fallen condition) we will be irrelevant; if we don't ground the theme in *history* of redemption (with reference to God's actual saving events) we will be moralistic or platitudinous.

2. It is 'narratively coherent' to set up a 'conflict' in the early part of the **sermon** outline and then 'resolve' it with Christ. This makes Christ, in a sense, the 'hero' of every sermon. (There are two kinds of conflicts I tend to use. a) First, there is a 'theme tension' conflict, in which we use the text to show God acting complexly or inexplicably, or in which we see a promise that doesn't seem could be fulfilled. Then we see how Jesus 'makes sense' of the complexity. b) Second, there is a 'breath-taking character' conflict, in which we highlight some great example of how to live and show how impossible this standard is to reach. Then we see how Jesus' work is the key to becoming like that example.

### *Pre-Fall* narratives.

- 1) The theme of creation directly lead us to Revelation 21-22 where we see that the ultimate goal in Christ is a new creation, a restoration of the beginning. In Revelation we see heaven coming down into earth, turning it into an urbanized Eden, with the tree of life and the river of life. This world matters! (It is 'good'.) There should be no Christian retreat from the enterprises of making this world a good place to live. God hates disease and poverty as well as heresy.
  - Felt need--to make the world a place of wholeness and justice. Show how Jesus does it. The goal of **all** of history is to re-unite heaven and earth in Christ (Eph 1) and renew the material world. Jesus created both the material and the immaterial. Jesus has both a body and a soul. He will renew both the material and the immaterial. To miss that this world was created in Christ OR that it is fallen and needs redemption in Christ will make you either too pessimistic or too optimistic about improving this world.
  - Jesus as the end-goal of **all** creation and its true **King**. Only under this Lordship does creation 'blossom' into fullness of what it was intended to be.
- 2) Adam is most definitely a 'type' of Christ in numerous ways: a) In our common physical ancestor we see all racism is wrong, we are all physically one. When we unite **with** him by faith, Jesus becomes our common spiritual ancestor. How much more in Jesus **Christ--who** saves us all by grace--is racism heinous and wrong! [Felt need--to overcome racism. Show how Jesus does it.) b) In our common physical ancestor we are made in God's image. How much more in Jesus are we being made into God's image.

- *Felt need*--to develop the enormous potentialities we sense we have. Show how Jesus does it. We sense these enormous potentials because we are created not just accidents. But we also sense them as only *potentials* because something holds them back or keeps them embryonic. Because we were designed to live for Christ, not anything else. When we live for him, the image of God is renewed in us.
- Jesus as the Image of God and as our 'Federal Head'. What is true of him in God's eyes is true of all those united with him.

3) God rests when his creative work is finished. In Christ, his redemptive work is 'finished' (on the cross) and only when we grasp gospel (as opposed to works-righteousness) can we receive deep spiritual rest (Heb 4). Without this rest, we won't do well at our daily work. We will over-work (driven, idolatrous) or underwork (selfishness, laziness).

- *Felt need*--to have satisfaction in work. Show how Jesus does it. Unless we have the deep peace of knowing we are accepted in Christ, we will either avoid work (because we can't take the pressure of defining ourselves by it) or over-work (because we will seek to get our **worth/definition** from money, achievement, and so on).
- Jesus as the True Rest and Lord of the Sabbath.

### *Fall Narrative.*

1) Genesis 3:15 is a prediction of a new humanity/ people of God that will grow and of a whole history of redemption. Most important of all, it describes a single figure "he" who will defeat the realm of evil and of Satan.

- *Felt need*: A discouraging sense of overwhelming evil in the world, an evil depicted in the most ancient tales represented by dragons, serpents, the demonic. How do we overcome this? Show how Jesus does it--(1) conversion "I will put" (2) community "the seed"--a new community (3) a Savior who defeats heart of evil "he will **crush his** head but who is one with us in our suffering under evil "he shall bruise **his** heel".
- Jesus as the Seed of the Woman

2) Genesis 3 shows we are made for relationship. with God, each other, our own selves. and nature/creation. The curse of sin disrupts every single one of these relationships which points to how through Christ every one of them will be restored.

- *Felt need*: Everyone knows the difficulty of relationships. Why? It is because we cannot bear to be seen in our true condition. We cannot even admit to ourselves the level of our weakness, self-centeredness, and fear. **Why? Because** we know instinctively that we can be known or loved but not both--because of our sin. **Yet** we were made to be known to the bottom and deeply delighted in for ourselves. Show how Jesus does it--In Christ only is our 'nakedness is covered' so we can have a relationship with God and one another again and we can be free from our shame and guilt. In Christ we finally are so accepted that we can finally admit the worst about ourselves. We are clothed in Jesus' righteousness. 'typified' by God's provision of clothing for Adam and Eve. Only in Christ can we be both known and loved fully. Neither religion or irreligion will ever give us this. In **Christ** we discern God again looking at us and saying. 'it is **good**.) This alone is the ultimate psychological cure and cure for all social relationships. Once we are 'covered' we can cover others.
- Jesus the Expiation for our sins. Our cover. In him we can see God's **face**.]

3) Genesis 3 shows us what is wrong **with** us--deep in our hearts we believed a lie 'God does not really care for you. He's trying to hold you down. The only way to reach your full potential is to dis-trust God's word and make your own decisions.'

- *Felt need*: My life is filled with disappointments. There are perfectly good 'trees' that God just simply won't let me have. Nothing wrong with them--he just seems to say 'no' for no good reason. I don't think God really cares for me. I wish I could believe he does. but I can't. My life stinks. Show how Jesus is the key. We spend all our

*Nakedness -  
Known & loved.*

lives assuming he doesn't love *us*. But despite that--here's the proof that God *does* care and that the Lie operating in us is a lie. Where do we see the proof? It lies within the true story of how the second Adam came to form a new people and he was also given a command about a tree. But it was much harder than the first. It said, "be crucified on the tree so your brothers and sisters can have their sin and guilt paid for." So he did it--out of love.

- Jesus as the greater Adam who undergoes the greater test in the Garden.

*O all ye who pass by--behold and see!*

*Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree*

*A tree of life to all--but only me.*

*Was ever grief like mine? (George Herbert. **The Sacrifice**)*

4) The test of Adam and Eve's obedience in the Garden parallels Jesus' temptation both in the wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane and finally our own temptations and tests throughout our lives.

- *Felt need-* to have self-control. What God wants is not just behavioral compliance but loving service. The tree-command means: "Please do this commandment *just because of Who I am*, just for me, not because it looks profitable to you. Obey me out of love." But we failed to love him because we believed the Lie that he doesn't care. Here 'the Lie' of the serpent is not just the fount of sadness but of disobedience. We lack self-control not just because we are 'bad' in some general way but because we disbelieve in the love and goodness of God. How can our hearts be changed? He obeyed the tree-command simply because of his love for his Father and for us. He obeyed not because it profited him but because it profited us. Now love God for *his own sake*, for the sake of his beauty and worth--because he loved you for your own sakes in Jesus.
- Jesus as the tested and obedient Son.

*Post-Fall, Pre-Patriarchal narratives.*

1) *In* Genesis 4 we see Abel pointing us to **Christ**. Like Abel. Jesus was also killed unjustly by 'elder brothers' (cf. Luke 15 and Gen 4)--people who were externally compliant with the law and sacrificial system but whose hearts were far from God. But unlike Abel, whose blood cries out from the ground for justice. Jesus' blood cries out and demands acquittal for us (Hebrews 12).

- *Felt need-* to deal with my own anger, resentment, and discouragement. What leads to it? 'Cains' are always angry at how their lives are going, are always feeling life is unfair, resent others. Why? Cains build an identity without God and therefore it is very fragile, subject to being slighted and to radical envy. Abels however base their identity on a relationship with God based on faith (Heb 11:4: Gen 3:15). Test: Cains hate Abels, but Abels do not resent and hate Cains. Show how Jesus solves it--Why can God care so tenderly for Cain, before and after, even giving him a '**mark**'--a safe-conduct? **Why** is there still hope for Cain? Because centuries later another great, sweet **Abel** came and died at the hands of elder brothers but his blood satisfies the justice that demands our condemnation. Jesus was the only *truly* and literally innocent man who died to take the curse for us **Cains**. He too became (**like Cain**) a homeless wanderer, rejected by others. If you believe he did this for you, you get a new identity and no longer a grumpy **Cain**. You too will be able finally to 'love the sinner **and** hate the sin', treating people with gentleness because you have been humbled yet **affirmed** in the gospel. Only then can you be vs. the evil and not filled with violent hatred against the evildoer. Only this analysis helps us avoid a) either denying the reality of evil, explaining it away as a social or psychological phenomenon. OR b) being sucked in to the cycle of evil, so that when you are mistreated you become trapped in hate and need for retaliation.

- Jesus as the true Abel, the innocent slain one.
- 2) In the flood narrative we have a classic case of two redemptive 'themes' that desperately need resolution. We have the obvious justice of God that demands judgement on sin (Gen 6:11-13) and yet we have a remarkable statement that the disobedience of the human race "*filled Cod's heart with pain*" (Gen 6:5-7). This is an astonishing claim--that God's heart is so tied to us that our condition causes him anguish and pain. How is it possible for a God absolutely intolerant of evil to be utterly, lovingly engaged with us as well. How can he be both? Won't he have to deny one side of his nature or the other? . And how can God be God and do that?
- Felt need. To understand the whole problem of justice. **On** the one hand I don't like the idea of a judging God, and yet on the other hand I do believe there is such a thing as justice and I don't want to see evil go unpunished. Show how Jesus is the key--Because of Jesus, God also can be a God who judges and yet is one who is patient, compassionate, providing lots and lots of room for change and returning. The flood brings Noah through the flood, and yet immediately he begins to do wrong. Noah carries the seeds of sin into the next world. **This** shows that, on the one hand, God is a God of judgement who won't let evil go unpunished, but it also shows that simple judgement alone won't really redeem the world. **Both** the judgement and the salvation of the flood was only partial. Noah was of the 'seed of the woman' but he was not the seed. **The** flood demonstrates that only a complete death and resurrection, only a thorough judgement and salvation will do. In Gen 6:5-7 we see God's heart suffering and breaking because of our sin, but on the cross his heart was literally broken because of our sin. Jesus is not just the true Noah who brings his people safely through the just/wrath of God into a new world, he is the true Jonah who was cast into the waters of that judgement in our place. That's how he gets us through. Just as the waters which would crush them down outside the ark lift up those within it, so the justice of God, because it has been satisfied in Christ, lifts us up if we 'get in' to him by faith. Notice that God's salvation in Christ is ultimately out to put us into a renewed, cleansed world--not just take us out of it.
  - Jesus as the true Noah, in whom we the ultimate example of how human sin causes God's heart pain.
- 3) In the narrative of the Tower of Babel we see mankind building a city. This desire to build cities is not wrong in itself, but is probably a capacity put into us at the beginning when we were told to multiply and *have* dominion The proof that city-building is the purpose of God for us is that at the end of time the world that God brings about is urban. History begins in a garden but ends in a city. But the human city is build **'to** make a namefor ourselves" (Gen 11:4) and therefore it has many problems.
- Felt needs: What do we do about the problems of cities? **a)** Racial tensions and **b)** Idolatry of sex, money, and power--come from going to cities to 'make a **name**for ourselves'--basing our identity on **race/culture** or on achievement. If we already have 'a name' when we go to cities, the good things of the cities won't become idols. Show how Jesus does this--**Jesus** job was to build the city that God wants (Heb 11:10). He went to the human city and there was rejected and killed, dying "outside **the gate**" to make the people holy through his blood. (Heb 13:12). Jesus lost the city so that we could be made citizens of the city to come. which makes us salt and light in the city that is. Only if we have salvation in Christ do we 'have a name' and then it is safe to live in human cities. They won't seduce us or bum us out. In fact, only if through Jesus we are members of the heavenly city will we be fearless enough to stay in cities who need good citizens and neighbors, and be a counter-culture. an alternative city (Matt 5:14) in the city.
  - Jesus. the City-builder (Heb 11:10: 13:14)

## Patriarchal Narratives

### Abraham

#### 1) Gen 12 - Abram's Call

Application issue: Abraham 'leaves his security zone' and follows God's call despite having to 'go it alone' without his family and despite having to leave his home culture. He can only become a blessing to others if he has this willingness to leave the normal sources of human security.

- Jesus, however, was the ultimate example of someone who heard a call away from security. He left heaven itself and his glory (Phil 2) all in order to die for us. Jesus lost his security so we could have the ultimate security--his love and salvation. When we have that, we will have the ability to take the kind of risks to reach out to other individuals and other cultures. Only then do we become people 'in mission'.

#### 2) Gen 13 - Abram and Lot Divide

- Application issue: Lot is an ambitious man who desires success, comfort, and status. He is willing to leave Abraham and the people of God in order to get it. Abraham is willing to let Lot take the choice grazing land and therefore lose much of his own potential for financial success. He does so despite being the older man--he does this in order to keep his relationship with Lot. Abram puts God and family relationships ahead of money and success.
- Jesus, however, is the ultimate example of one who put his relationship with us ahead of his own wealth and comfort. Through his **poverty** we become rich. Jesus was also tested, like Abraham, with bread and power, but he resisted, at far greater cost. We will never be like Abraham until we believe in the one to whom Abraham points. Until we see his poverty for our riches, we will not keep money in perspective.

#### 3) Gen 15 - God's Covenant with Abram

- Application issue: Abraham expresses doubts and is having trouble living with confidence in God. Doubt has two parts: a) we don't trust ourselves, b) we don't trust God. We are afraid God will fail us, or that we will fail God. Either or both reasons make us afraid to really live in trust on God. In response to Abram's doubts **God** makes Abram cut animals in half. The customary way to make a solemn promise was to have two **parties** go through the pieces, assuming the curse of unfaithfulness. ("If I don't accomplish what I promise today, may I be as these animals.") To Abram's astonishment, only God passes through.
- Jesus is the only way to make sense of this scene. a) By going through the pieces, God is promising to fulfill his promise to bless Abram. He is saying, "you can be sure about **me**." b) But by not letting Abram go through the pieces, he is assuming the full responsibility for blessing Abram. He is saying, 'I will bless you no matter what you do, even if it means my being torn limb from limb myself.' Only in Jesus does this make sense. And so God is saying, 'Not do you not need to worry about **my** failing you, you don't have to worry about **yow** failing me. I will bless you no matter what.' It is because Christ took the curse of our covenant-breaking that God can bless us unconditional.

#### 4) Gen 16/21 - Hagar and Ishmael

- Application issue: Exploitation and oppression. **Hagar** is an exploited slave. Both **Abram** and **Sarah** make use of her for their own ends. The reason that **Hagar's** son will belong to Sarah is because **Hagar** herself is just Sarah's property. The text indicates that **eventually** Sarah beats her and she runs away. It is a terrible story of a racially and economically marginalized woman. But in a surprising **turn** 'The Angel of the Lord' comes and says literally that he '**has heard your oppression**' (16:11) and **promises** to care for her and for the son she bears. Later, in **chapter 21**

Murdock Volf, Exclusion & Embrace

the Lord saves Ishmael's life again because he '*hears the boy's cry*'. This is completely unexpected, that God would consider the oppression of an Egyptian slave woman something he 'hears' in and of itself, without a prayer, and that he would express such concern even for the exploited and troubled people outside his chosen line--so great is his passion for justice.

- Jesus is the "Angel of the Lord", who cares for the oppressed and counsels them lovingly. (In Matthew 11:10 Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 about the 'angel of the covenant' and identifies himself with him.) But why can God show concern (even if it is not saving concern) for Hagar and Ishmael? Centuries later another boy will be born to a poor mother, announced by an angel "you shall call his name". He will also become a refugee "Out of Egypt I called my son" who will experience oppression and injustice. With all our afflictions he has been afflicted. That is why he is the God who notices our troubles ("who sees me" Gen 16:13). That is why oppression 'rings in his ears' and he hears it, even **unarticulated**. **Ultimately**, God refused to hear his Son's cry so that he can be gracious when our sons cry (cf. 21:17).1

#### 5) Gen 18/21 - Sarah, the laugh, and her son

- Application issue: God visits Sarah and Abram and promises (again!) a son. Sarah laughs, but it is a laugh of either bitterness and/or nervousness. It is not an expression of true joy. But when Isaac is actually born, then Sarah's laughter is turned to one of true joy. **F**The Hebrew indicates she is now laughing (at least in part) at herself, in humility. **Why the difference?** It takes pride to be unhappy. When we try to save ourselves it leads to proud laughter (mocking others) or bitter laughter (mocking ourselves or life). But when we see that God has been patient and blessed us despite our failures, there is humble laughter ('how could I have been so stupid?') along with joyous laughter ('but he really does love me'). Humble confidence brings real joy.1
- Jesus is the ultimate 'Isaac' who brings us true joy. Abram and Sarah had a **real** choice before them. The angel says to Mary '**nothing** is impossible **with** God' at her doubt (Luke 1) just as God says to Sarah. Why? Both sons are miraculous births that are acts of God's saving grace. But Jesus is the far greater one. Ishmael and Isaac represented two different ways to get God's blessing. Ishmael represented the way of 'works', of getting a son in a way they had a human ability to achieve. Isaac represented the way of 'grace' and Christ, of getting a son by simply waiting in faith for what only God could do. (See Gal 4). Isaac points us to Christ, in which we finally hear the laughter of God's grace.

#### 6) Gen 18 - Abraham Pleads with God

- Application issue: Abraham is remarkably bold and familiar yet humble and deferential to God. He is remarkably concerned for unrighteous pagan people. **This** kind of prayer and friendship with God is inexplicable. Neither religious nor **secular/liberal** people pray like this.
- Jesus is the ultimate High Priest and Advocate who stands before the Father and prays on our behalf. Only in our High Priest can we approach God, and this makes us humbler than the people with a 'Love-only' God yet bolder than the people with a 'Law-only' God.

#### 7) Gen 22 - Abraham Sacrifices Isaac

- Application issue: How do we grow in greatness of character? This story is **the** climax of long, convoluted journey for Abraham in which he has been brought from average-ness into greatness. How can we live a 'big life' despite all the changes, troubles, threats, times of confusion? How can we keep our course **steadily**? When God demanded the firstborn as a sacrifice Abraham probably knew what God was saying. God was not asking him to simply murder his son. (He didn't need to go up



on a high mountain to do that.) The firstborn was the vessel of all the family's hopes. Yet God repeatedly says (Exod 22:29; Numbers 3,8) that the life of the firstborn of every family is forfeit and has to be redeemed by money or sacrifice. This was God's using a major ancient symbol (the first born) to communicate that over every family on earth hung a debt of sin to eternal justice. If Abraham had heard God say, 'kill Sarah' he would have thought it was a hallucination. But when he heard him call 'give up your firstborn' Abraham knew that God was calling in his family's debt of sin. God had a right to do that--he had a right to be a God of justice--but what of the promise of grace and salvation through Isaac?

- What gave Abraham the ability to climb this mountain and to follow through and to triumph? A) If Abraham was a 'moralist' who believed God was only a God of severe moral demand. then he would never have walked up the mountain. He would have had no hope at all and probably just laid down and died right there. All hope of grace and salvation through Isaac was gone. But Abraham **did** know God was a God of surprising grace and went up hoping to return with Isaac (Gen 22:5). B) If Abraham was instead a 'modernist' who believed God was only a God of love, then he would have simply cursed God and gone home. He'd have said, 'what right do you have to demand this of me?' But Abraham did know God had this right, since he was a righteous God. What propelled Abraham up the mountain then was a belief that God could be both just and justifier of Abraham and Isaac, though he didn't know how. Then at the top of the mountain a substitute animal is provided.
- Jesus alone makes sense of this story. The only way that God can be both just (demanding payment of our sin-debt) and justifier (providing salvation and grace) is because years later another Father (God) went up another 'mountain' (Calvary) with his firstborn and offered him there for us all. Paul deliberately echoes this passage in Romans 8:32 when he speaks of God offering up *his* only son. And now we can live the 'big life' Abraham did. and let nothing shake us. because we can know how God loves, cherishes, delights in us despite what things look like in life. How can we know? What God spoke to Abraham, we can speak to God. "Now we know that you love us. because you did not withhold your son. your only son, from us." You will never be as great, as secure in God. as unflappable, as courageous as Abraham simply by trying, but only if you believe in the Savior to whom this event points. Only if Jesus lived and died for us can you have a God of infinite love and holiness at once. ]

## PREACHING CHRIST - ONE TINY 'LAW' CASE STUDY

To preach the gospel is to continually put the law into a context of grace. With a RHM/Christ-centered focus we must teach that 1) the law in general was given after the exodus and only as the stipulations for the relationship **with** God established by **grace**,<sup>31</sup> and 2) each law in particular is grounded in the nature of God and the saving work of Christ. Therefore, if we preach a sermon on 'thou shalt not commit adultery' we must put the requirements and prohibitions of this law into the context of our relationship **with** Christ as our bridegroom. We must see that the ultimate reason that someone would commit adultery is that sexual relations has become an idol and is being used to fill a need that only a saving relationship with Christ **can** fill. So we will never be sexually pure just by 'trying'--nor do we need to fear that our lack of **sexual purity** in the past has made us unacceptable to God. For Jesus died for us. his bride, not **because** we were spotless and beautiful but in order to make us so.

## PREACHING CHRIST - PSALMS CASE STUDIES

### *Notes on Method:*

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<sup>31</sup> See the works of Meredith G. Kline on this subject.

1. You don't need to look for Christ only in the traditional 'Messianic' Psalms. When Paul in Rom. 15:8-9 quotes Ps. 18:49 as being the words of Christ, he takes them from a Psalm that seems to have no reference at all to any Messiah, anointed prince, suffering servant. Why did he do that? The answer: Paul sees that Christ as the Lord of the covenant is the **object** of every Psalm, **and** as the truest Servant of the Covenant, is the **subject** of every Psalm. So when you are seeking and searching out the Psalms, look at each one both ways. Think of each Psalm text being sung TO Jesus and BY Jesus.

2. First, remember that Jesus did literally sing and pray the Psalms. Imagine the Psalm being sung by Jesus--what he thought as he sang them in the different aspects of his person and work. Examples: a) Imagine him singing the Psalms in his humanity, b) in his deity, c) in his humiliation, d) in his exaltation. Always ask--how would this Psalm statement resonate in the mind of Jesus, knowing what he came to do? When you come to a Lament, you nearly automatically think of it in reference to suffering or feelings **you** have had. But remember what **he** suffered and how this Psalm would relate to him.

3. Second, imagine yourself singing the Psalm to Jesus. Imagine him right before you in the room. When you come to a Psalm of refuge, you would thank him that it is possible to 'hide' in him and he covers our sins from punishment, which is your only real ultimate danger. When you come to a Psalm of Wisdom, you would thank him that the gospel is the only way to make sense of the ambiguities of life--you are a righteous sinner, living in the overlap of the ages.

4. Don't neglect the classic Messianic Psalms. They contain particularly rich views of Christ. They include the following:

- a) The Conquering King and enthroned Messiah--Ps. 2 and 110.
- b) The Rejected Messiah -- Ps. 118
- c) The Betrayed Messiah -- Ps 69 and 109
- d) The Dying and Raised Messiah -- Ps. 22 and 16
- e) The Plan and Marriage of the Messiah -- Ps. 40 and 45
- f) The Triumph of the Messiah -- Ps. 68 and 72

### Ps 1 - The Way of Happiness

Theme: The secret to life is meditation.

**OUTLINE:** How to find true happiness: v. 1-2 Consider **who** we listen/meditate on--in heart of hearts. We will naturally meditate on 'counsel of wicked'. **or** we will deliberately make ourselves meditate on the **law** of the Lord. There are no other alternatives. What shapes your thinking (counsel) shapes your behavior (**way**) and **attitude/heart (scoffers)**. v. 2- **How** to meditate: delight the heart (a command!), discipline the mind ('**meditate**'='plot') (**day** and night). center on the word (law of the Lord). v. 2-3- **Why** to meditate: (1) it makes you stable (vs. seasonal-leaf never wither). fruitful (vs. barren--things you do are lasting. 'prosper'). you become **substantial/rooted** (vs. chaff weightless and passing) v. 3- How to meditate: meditation is like drinking from streams and delighting. Digesting and tasting both. The word is like streams of water. v. 3c- **Result#1:** whatever he does prospers! Nothing in vain! v. 5-6-Result #2-meditation leads to particular pattern of life. character v. 6 **Result#3-** Safety. Assurance! Obedient path is watched and guarded.

**PRAYING IT:** Adore: He's a **speaking** God: a delightful God: a watching God. Confess: The lack of time given to meditation and contemplation: The amount of knowledge I have without delight: It is knowledge **w/o** contemplation that I is the reason for my failures to live holy; I don't realize that I always prosper. Aspire: (1) To make the **time** for the Law of the Lord: (2) To delight in God when reading. Don't just make it intellectual. (3) To tackle one or two failures of character through contemplation. (4) Avoid scoffing OR naivete--both lack humility. Humble. joyful. irony.

With Christ: (1) He is the one who delights in the Law of his will (Heb. 10:7 quotes Ps. 40:8 about him-'I delight to do your will; your **Law** is within my heart')). He is the one who prays day

and night (Luke 5:16-"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed"; 6:12-"he went to a mountainside and prayed all night"; 9:18,28; 11:1; 22:39-40-"as usual".) He is the one who meditated so profoundly on Scrip that he quoted it in the most extreme moments of his life (on the cross--Ps.22). He was deeply rooted and saturated in the Scrip. See Ps.119. He is the one, who when he looks to God, experiences delight. (Lk.3:21-"as he was praying, heaven opened and the HS descended and a voice said--you are my Son") (2) But most of all, you *can't* delight in the law of the Lord without Jesus. Without him, the law is nothing but a curse, a condemnation. a witness against us (Gal.3:10-11). He obeyed the law fully for us (2 Cor.5:21), so now it is a delight to us. not an everlasting despair.

## Ps 2 - The Way of Fearlessness

Theme: How to avoid a fearful life. The irresistibility of the kingdom.

OUTLINE: v. 1-3- People who run the world don't see Word of God as truth that roots and heals (Ps.1) but a chain that enslaves. When we feel that God's rule over us is a bondage, that is the remnant of the world's mindset in us. The question 'why?' is unanswerable--rhetorical. To think of God's rule as slavery is irrational--it posits more wisdom to us than we have or character assassination of God. v.4-5-God laughs at the world rebellion. That is an assurance to us (not sadistic of him!). We need to see that there is no chance of his kingdom losing. Intimidation by the world (Psalm 2) is as fatal to prayer as attraction to it (Psalm 1)! v.6-7-"You are my son" is God's answer to the world's evil and injustice. v.6-Messiah is on Zion: a) a temple hill-sacrifice! b) a little hill-hidden from world's values. He is here, but hidden. c) a chosen hill--a matter of grace. v.8- A missionary mandate! This Messiah is for all the world! v.4-12-God's power and purpose includes and overwhelms the purpose of world. v.10- Wisdom is to have fierce delight in the kingdom of God. This is as corporate a psalm (emphasizing commitment to the spread of the kingdom of God) as psalm 1 is individual (emphasizing personal devotion), v.12- There is, in the end No refuge from him only in him (DK)

PRAYING IT: Adore: The power/irresistibility of God's kingdom. Assurance of his triumph.

Confess: Not enough joyful fear and trembling (v.11-12) Awe. Also, not enough thinking about the kingdom of God--too individualistic in my concerns. Also, too little confidence in life.

Aspire: To have a joyful confidence in plans for ministry. To not fear or be intimidated by the power of the world. it's derision of God.

WITH CHRIST: (1) It is pre-eminently in Christ that we see God's laughter at the rebellion of the world. God sets his Messiah on the throne not just in spite of their rebellion. but through it. Acts 4:24-31 perfectly shows us that the people who thought they were destroying the Messiah only did 'what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen'. By slaying Jesus. they only destroyed their own power. Thus the cross is the ultimate example of how laughable is rebellion against God. It is laughable because it a) can't do a whit against him. b) will be used by him to establish grace (cf.Ps.76:10). But God is *not* laughing at the suffering our rebellion costs or the price it took to deal with it. DK p.51.

## Ps 4 - Unconditional Joy

Theme: How to have joy and delight apart from circumstances.

### OUTLINE:

v.1- *The Source* of my joy: "My righteous God". He is righteous and yet he is my God--he is for me! A God of love and righteousness.

v.2-3 **Application#1-to Divided hearts.** The first reason we don't have joy and delight in all circumstances is we have divided hearts. Get rid of idols! You are chosen by grace for intimacy ('himself'). Don't serve God and idols. That's why you don't have intimacy. Without intimacy with God you can't live a stable life.

v.4-5 **Application#2-to Bitter hearts.** The second reason we don't have joy and delight in all circumstances is we often are bitter and resentful. Get rid of anger! How? You should live in humility ('search your hearts'). Trust him (v.5)--don't think you know best. Humble yourself.

v.6-7 **Application#3-to Suffering hearts.** If we have worked on intimacy and humility (above) then in suffering we will have the light of Gods "face" (v.6b) and it will get us through.

WITH CHRIST - v.1 refers both to God's upholding of justice in general and his commitment to me. How could he be both for justice and for me? Only through Jesus Christ! Because of Jesus' life and death, God can be '*both just and Justifier of those who believe*'. Only in Jesus Christ can he truly be *my righteous God* (both 'righteous' yet 'my'). Only praying v.1 in Christ will make the rest of the Psalm active. When I see what Christ has done, only then can I be sure God will always answer me (v.1). Only then can I truly love him instead of idols and humble myself so I am not always angry. Only then can I truly know he is working in my suffering, as he worked in Christ's. Addendum: I know God will answer me when I call (v.1) because one terrible day, he did not answer Jesus when he called 'my God' (Matt.27:46)

PRAYING IT: Adoration. 1) That God is a righteous God, 2) that he is 'my' God--a personal God. who is for me. 3) that in Christ he can be both. Confession. 1) I tend to get angry in bed. not humbler! I tend to think about my troubles and get resentful that my life isn't going well. Forgive me. 2) Forgive me my idols. Thanksgiving. 1) Thank you that you have not held my petty resentments toward you against me. 2) Thank you that in Jesus Christ, you answer me. because one day you didn't answer him. 3) Thank you that in Jesus Christ's suffering. I see an example of how you can work through pain and trouble. Supplication. 1) Help me to sleep! (v.8) Let these truths really affect my heart so I have your peace. 2) Let me see the light of your face (v.6) I know so little of that.

### Ps 133 - The Unity of Believers

Theme: The unity between believers.

OUTLINE: v.1- How deep is it? Unity is family level. Believers are "brothers", not just an association. This level is both good (fitting reality) and pleasant (pleasurable, fitting our hearts). v.2-How can it be gotten? Unity is a gift from above, not an achievement. It comes 'down'. coming on to us from above. Thus it can only be maintained, not attained (cf.Eph.4:3). v.3- How do we maintain it? Unity arises from being 'set apart'. Oil was to consecrate priest--it was a very expensive ('precious' or 'good') honor. It depicts both 1) being accepted by costly grace (becoming fragrant, cover odor) and 2) being set apart to live for God above all (becoming empowered, healed and strengthened). Experience of costly grace and commitment to service create unity. It is a by-product blessing; it can't be achieved directly. v.4- Why does it unify? Unity is a product of grace. Both great (Mt.Hermon) and small (Zion hill) get the same blessing equally. This unites everyone, for 'there'--in little Zion--we are blessed. Not on the peaks of achievement. but the place God chose by grace to bestow eternal life forevermore.

PRAYING IT: Adore: An anointing God. who 1) accepts us and 2) empowers us. A gracious God who bestows blessing on a hill anyone can reach. not high peaks. Confess: My fears of being 'stinky' to Christian brethren, rather than fragrant make it hard to be vulnerable. Aspire: Enjoyment of one another. Deep unity that the world finds fragrant and beautiful. The 'dew'-- the joy and honor and delight of the highest achievements and love coming upon us because of the knowledge of our gracious salvation.

WITH CHRIST: Aaron's fragrance and holiness before God is only a dim picture of the great High Priest, whose blessing now comes upon us all. He is not ashamed to call us 'brothers' (Heb.2:11-12); he is the true elder brother, who lost his fragrance and became a stench that we could be accepted. His priesthood is the basis of our priesthood and our unity with one another.

### Ps 134 - God Blesses from Zion (linked to Ps133)

Theme: Where to get God's blessing.

OUTLINE: v.1-The Levitical singers were to stand day and night (in shifts) before the Lord, ever thanking and praising the Lord (1 Ch.23:26,30). v.2-They are to face the Holy of Holies. the seat or face of God. and praise the Lord. v.3-In w.1-2, we are blessing God--honoring and serving him. Now God blesses us--honoring us and **servicing us!** "To bless God is to acknowledge...what He is...to bless man. God must make of him what he is not. v.3-But he blesses from Zion. Zion is a place, where you can go--neither a high Mt. to climb or an uncharted Mt. to discover. Thus his blessing is 'very near you'-Dt.30:11-14; Ro.10:6ff. In Christ. you can even go to Zion without moving your legs at all.

PRAY IT: Adore: Almighty God (Maker of heaven and Earth), yet accessible God (blesses you from Zion) Confess: The accessibility of blessing, yet I am not relentless enough in praise to find it. Aspire: Service to God; regular praise before his face--'lift up hands before his holiness'; learn how to go to Zion thro Christ (Heb.12)

WITH CHRIST: Through him, we come to the true Mt.Zion (Heb.12:22-24). This is the true way to access to his presence. a) v.24 his spilled blood cries out for a fulfilled justice--i.e. grace. b) v.23 our names are written in heaven (Luke 10). It is in Christ. on the cross that the Almighty yet Accessible God can bless us, for his truth and love were both satisfied. If it were not for Christ. we couldn't praise God at all. only be afraid of his wrath.

### Ps 135 - The Pleasure of Praise

Theme: **Why** and how to praise God.

OUTLINE: v.1-2. Praise the Lord. v.3-4. **Why** should we praise the Lord? v.3a Because of his character--'good'--he is worthy in himself. v.3b Because of our hearts--'pleasant'--we are built for it! v.4a Because of his grace--'chosen Jacob'--he knows us by grace v.4b Because of our new relationship--'own...treasured'--a) he now delights in us as precious treasure in his sight. so his treasuring us is why we worship, but also b) his worship is how we more become 'his own', his treasure. Sum: If you think of these four things properly, gracious affections will arise. v.5-12 **How** should we praise the Lord? v.5. Sum of the two ways. v.6-14. 1st way: Meditate on his greatness: v.6-7 **Rejoice** over his greatness in nature. and v.8-14 **Recall** over his greatness in history. Think of his redemptive actions for all in the Red Sea and the Cross. Think of his redemptive acts in your life. by which he chose you, made you his own, showed you his delight with you. v.15-18. 2nd way: **Repent**. Pull hands off idols. They are just you yourself (v.15). they cannot deliver (v.16), they will lead you to death (v.17). v.19-21. **Witness**. Tell others and call them to praise. Evangelism: community.

PRAYING IT: Adore: Good God; delightful God; gracious God; All-powerful over nature; All-powerful over evil: only living God. Confess: I do not know or live as if I am treasured. I do not know or live as if my treasurer is Almighty. In other words. I live in slavish 'fear', not sonship 'fear' (v19). Aspire: I don't want to praise in order to feel treasured. That puts me back in the center and uses God. Let me lose myself in praise to find myself.

WITH CHRIST: It is Christ who stands in our midst and teaches us to sing praises. (Heb.2:12). How? We see Lord's **goodness/grace** supremely in Jesus (v.3-4). We see him treasuring us supremely in Jesus (v.4) being tender with the widow (Luke7:13) the deaf-mute (Mark7:33), children and women and dying on cross. We see his greatness in history mainly in the cross (v.8-14).And our need for a God with mouths, eyes, ears, and value (v.15-18) is only fulfilled in Jesus. the eikon of God (Col.1:15).

### Ps 136 - His Grace is Boundless

Theme: We need to continually drill the gospel into our hearts through **worship/remembering**.

OUTLINE: 'Give **thanks**'= to 'confess' or **remember/realize**. Has to do with being **controlled/shaped** by our thanks. To live in grateful **joy/shaped** in present by his grace in past. 'Love'= sacrificial covenant commitment. We should repeatedly remember the rememberer (v.23) who he is and what he has done until the boundlessness of his mace dawns on us. v. 1-3 Remember who he is. v.4-9 Remember his acts of creation and providence. v. 10-22 Remember his acts of redemption in history, how he brought us out of bondage by mighty acts. v.23-25 His love is not just boundless in terms of time (**forever**) but in terms of **worthiness/condition (our low estate) and space (everycreature)**.v.25-It was not just in the past, but something that he exercises now. v.26 - Remember his utter heavenliness and supremacy.

PRAYING IT: Adore 'Endless love'--the thing we sing about is only here! Praise for wonders of creation (v. 4-9) Praise that my old slave-masters are cast out by you (v.14-18). Praise that you can sustain me in **desert/hard** times (v.16). Praise you loved me though I was unworthy mess (v.23) Praise that you are kind to all (v.25)--**so** broad in your love. Praise for heavenly supremacy. Confess I don't live life of thankfulness--shaped by knowledge of boundless grace: a) not see creation **itself** as **gift** of grace (v.4-9)b) not live as if truly freed from slavemasters

(v.10-22). Still living defensive, driven, absorbed, bored. Aspire To be shaped completely by the knowledge of boundless grace.

WITH CHRIST: v.10 At the first exodus, the Egyptian first born had to die for the people to be liberated. but at the ultimate exodus (Luke9) it was God's own first born. v.13-15 At the first exodus, the ruler of 'this world' was dethroned in a mighty historical miraculous act of redemption (RedSea): at the ultimate exodus, the ruler of this world (and the false slavemasters under him) were dethroned by the cross and resurrection--mighty historical acts of redemption. v.23-25 It is now only as we remember the past--of what Christ did--that we can be sure of the future (cf.135:10-14) that he will come again. We are shaped in how we live in world now by continually rehearsing past grace--like Israel. Both of us would say the same thing: a) I was in bondage, b) but I took shelter under the blood of the lamb, and acts of God in history to break slavemaster's power c) now in a wilderness, but God is with us, living according to his polity, d) till we come to our true country.

### *Preaching Christ and the 'Imprecatory' Psalms*

The 'Christo-centric' (RHM) preaching approach is absolutely the only way to preach or make sense of the (many!) imprecatory Psalms and passages in the Psalms. On the one hand, the 'imprecations' are simply cries for justice, and such a passion is surely right. So for example, despite the troubling, shocking ending to Psalm 137, the writer is appealing to simple justice. If any fair-minded observer is asked the question: 'what do the perpetrators deserve?' the answer would be 'the degree of suffering they imposed on others.' (cf. Derek Kidner. *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary*, p. 460.) "Our response to such a Scripture should. we suggest, be...to distill the essence of it, as God Himself did with the cries of Job and Jeremiah...This raw wound, thrust before us. forbids us to give smooth answers to the fact of cruelty..." (Kidner, p. 461) Kidner adds. however, "our response...isto recognize our calling, since the cross, to pray down reconciliation not judgement [on our enemies]." If we 'tone down' the cry against injustice as something 'primitive' we cannot appreciate the cross--because there we see that the punishment for such cruelty is exactly what the Psalmist has called for. We see God's 'little one' being dashed to pieces. Yes, the punishment that human injustice and evil deserves is just as bad as the imprecation stated! But what the Psalmist could not see is that when God's Messiah came the first time, he came to bear the judgement on human evil, not mete it out. And the Psalmist could not see that he deserves to be condemned as well for his own life-record. At the Psalmist's 'stage in Redemptive-History' he was stating truth as far as he could see it. But we now have been both humbled by the cross (so we cannot cry for vengeance in the same way) and we have been given enormous hope by the cross. We see that God will do justice in the earth. He is so passionately against it that he experienced it himself so that he could some day end all evil without ending us. This keeps me from having to put my self in his place and become sucked up into the endless cycle of vengeance and retaliation.

So the Imprecatory Psalms are taken very seriously by the cross--they point to the drastic action God took on the cross. Yet *because* of the cross, we do not cry for vengeance in the same way. We can seek out justice in society without any blood-lust (or indeed even ill-will).

In short. there is no way to preach the imprecatory Psalms without pointing to Christ. A non-Christological reading of these Psalms will only lead to Christians being led into an anachronistic 'holy **war**' mentality.

## EXPOUNDING CHRIST

## CHAPTER 3 -

TO WHOM? TO GOSPEL-NEEDING  
LISTENERS

## INTRODUCTION

Now we come to a third 'perspective' on what it means to 'expound Christ from every text'. Theologically considered, this means we see the Bible as a unified redemption-history, not as an collection of moral and spiritual principles. Hermeneutically considered, this means we interpret each text Christologically, avoiding both the interpretive errors moralizing and allegorizing. But *pastorally* considered, to 'preach Christ' from every text means to *preach the gospel all the time*. We believe that "the gospel" is not just a way to enter the kingdom of God (and 'get saved') but it is the fundamental dynamic for living the whole Christian life--individually and corporately, privately and publicly. In other words, the gospel is not just for **non-Christians**, but also for Christians. Everybody in the listening audience needs the gospel *every* week. In other chapters we will discuss why this is so, but in this chapter we should address the question--what is the gospel? When anyone hears someone say, "we need to preach the gospel every week" there will be a fear of being repetitive. And indeed there is a danger of this unless we understand the gospel 1) in Biblical perspectives and 2) as a story.

## THE GOSPEL IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES.

	FOCUS	CALL/ARTICULATION	USE
<b>Doctrinalist</b>	JC's substitutionary work	"He livd the life you shld hav livd and died the death you shld have died. Rest in his finished work Faith in truth	Evangelism/ Theological training  <u>Preaching</u>
<b>Culturalist</b>	Kingdom now but not yet	Receive the kingdom! Reverse wrlds values. Salv cam to wrld thro losing pwr: now receive it by surrender your will and <b>identifying</b> with poor and powerless. Repent, change Lords	Generosity/ reconciliation  <u>Doing: iustice</u>
<b>Pietist</b>	Grace vs. <b>works/performance</b>	Accept yr acceptance. You are more sinful than you dared believe but more loved and accepted in Christ than you dared hope. Rely on Grace	Problem-solving, <b>personal/church</b> renewal <u>Counseling</u>

The word *evangelion* ('the gospel') or *evangelizdomai* ('declare the gospel') occurs so often in the New Testament (virtually every author uses it) that "*clearly the term gospel is a kind of code word for many New Testament writers that summarizes something very basic regarding what the early Christians though Christian faith was all about.*"<sup>32</sup> But what is that 'very basic' core of Christian faith?

<sup>32</sup> James V. Brownson, Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic. [Christian Mission and Modem Culture Series](Trinity Press: Harrisburg, PA. 1998), p.31.

In our desperate search for simplicity, it is easy to overlook the great variety of ways that the 'gospel' is used in the Bible. The most obvious example is how Paul makes 'gospel' almost synonymous with 'justification by faith', while the gospel writers almost seem to make it synonymous with 'the kingdom of God'. We have to be careful that we do not elevate one perspective on the gospel over all others, nor that we assume the perspectives contradict one another. We must have an outline of the gospel that encompasses the way all the Biblical writers speak.

News vs. Ethical Instruction ("THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST" Mark 1:1)  
 The 'normative' perspective: What happened?

When the early Christians chose the term Greek term "ev-angelion" they immediately distinguished the Christian message apart from that of other religions. An 'angel' was a herald or messenger that brought news of some historical event that had already happened, and that had changed our condition. The most common examples in Greek literature are "evangels" about a victory in war or the ascension of a new king.

When Christians chose *evangelion* to express the essence of their faith, they passed over words that Hellenistic religions used, such as "illumination" (*photismos*) and "knowledge" (*gnosis*) or that Judaism used such as "instruction" or "teaching" (*didache*) or "wisdom" (*sophia*).<sup>33</sup> Of course, all of these words were used to describe Christianity. but none achieved the centrality of "gospel". What does that mean? First, it means that the gospel is news about what God has already been done for you, rather than instruction and advice about what you are to do for God. The primacy of his work, not our work, is part of the essence of faith. In other religions. God reveals to us how we can find or achieve salvation. In Christianity, God achieves salvation for us. The gospel brings news primarily, rather than instruction.

Second, it means that the gospel is all about historic events, and thus it has a public character. *"It identifies Christian faith as news that has significance for all people, indeed for the whole world. not merely as esoteric understanding or insight."*<sup>34</sup> In other religions. the stories of miracles and other special events in the lives of the founder are not essential. Whether or not Buddha did Miracle X. that does not affect whether the 8-Fold path to enlightenment works or not. But if Jesus is not risen from the dead. Christianity does not "work". The gospel is that Jesus died and rose for us. If the historic events of his life did not happen. then Christianity does not "work" for the good *news* is that God has entered the human "now" (history) with the life of the world to come.

This public. historic aspect of the gospel is especially seen when the term "the gospel of Christ" or "of Jesus Christ" is used. Often the word "gospel" and the life and work of Christ are essentially synonyms. Particularly significant is how Luke links "gospel" to "Jesus". In Acts 5:42, it reads, literally. *"they never stopped... evangelizing Christ Jesus"*. Obviously, Jesus is not the object of their evangelism (they are not trying to convert him!) But the word *"evangelizdomenoi"* means, **all** by itself, 'to preach the gospel' or literally "to gospelize". So in the places in Acts where it says, literally "they evangelized Jesus", the English translations have to render it "they told the gospel about Jesus Christ" or "they told the good news that Jesus was the Christ" (cf. NIV Acts 5:42). But the Greek construction **clearly** has a stronger meaning than that. Its intentional redundancy aims to say that the good news they preached *was* Jesus. His very life, and all his works, is what saves us. To declare Jesus and to declare the gospel is the same thing. Jesus does not bring the **gospel**-he is the gospel. because the gospel is that God has broken into history and accomplished everything necessary for our salvation. (You will find this same construction repeatedly.

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<sup>33</sup> Brownson. p.46.

<sup>34</sup> Brownson. p.46.



See Acts 8:35, 10:36, 11:20.) We can also see the terms "gospel of Christ" or "gospel of Jesus Christ" in Mark 1:1; 1 Cor.9:12,18; 2 Cor.2:12; 9:13;10:14; Gal.1:7, and so on. (Compare also Rom.1:9-"The gospel of his Son".)

Summary: First, the gospel is news that Jesus Christ's life and death and resurrection in history has achieved our salvation. Unlike the founders of religions, who could be said to bring good news, Jesus is the good news. It is interesting to notice that "the gospel of Jesus Christ" is used both by the Synoptic writers (cf. Mark 1:1) who emphasize also the kingdom aspect of the gospel. and by Paul. who emphasizes the sonship aspect of the gospel.

- Grace vs. Pride of Place ("THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM" Matt.4:23)  
The 'situational' perspective: How did it happen?

We also see that the gospel is not simply that Christ has come into history to save us. but also how he will accomplish that. Answer is through a new, deep structure or 'paradigm' that completely contradicts the way of the world. God's saving purposes are effected through the crucified and risen Christ. Christ wins through losing, triumphs through defeat. achieves power through service, comes to wealth via poverty. Jesus pulls off a 'great reversal'. *"The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God. while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man...puts himself where only God deserves to be: God...puts himself where only man deserves to be."*<sup>35</sup>

This pattern so contradicts the thinking and practice of the world. that it creates an 'alternate kingdom'. an 'alternate city' (Matt.5:14-16). Many Christians 'reduce' the gospel to the good news of individual forgiveness of sins. But clearly, the gospel writers are talking about something much more than that. The "*gospel of the kingdom*" is a phrase used numerous times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The 'Great Reversal' of the cross means that the gospel proclaims a complete reversal of the values of the world--power, recognition, status, wealth. For example, the gospel is especially welcomed by the poor and for the poor (Luke 4:18- *He has anointed me... to preach the gospel to the poor.*" Cf. also Luke 7:22.) Preaching the gospel and healing people's bodies are closely associated (Luke 9:6). The gospel creates a people with a whole alternate way of being human. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition--all these things are marks of living in the world. and are the opposite of the mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26).

What is the relationship of the gospel to the kingdom? On the one hand. we could say that the gospel 'brings' the kingdom, in that it transforms people so that they live according to the great reversal of the cross. Luke tells us in 16:16 that the gospel brings or proclaims a kingdom that we need to 'press into' and enter. People who are converted by the gospel "see" a new kingdom (cf. John 3:3--"*No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again*") and also enter that kingdom (John 3:5). Once we see that we are sinners saved by grace alone, our old patterns are broken up, and live lives of sacrificial service rather than self-aggrandizement (cf. 2 Cor.8:9). But on the other hand. the in-breaking kingdom of God is the gospel! Twice Luke actually says that the kingdom is the gospel message (Luke 4:43; 16:16). The fact that Jesus has broken in to history to redeem all of life and give us a new order is great news. Why?

Looking for salvation to anything but the grace of Christ sets up an 'idol' or a 'power' or a 'false savior-king'. Human society is miserable under the influence of these idol-powers: such as sex money, power, or race. (Also, human hearts are miserable under the influence personal idol-powers, such as approval, comfort, control.) When we understand that we can be saved by sheer grace through Christ, we stop seeking salvation (either that of

<sup>35</sup> John Stott. The Cross of Christ. Qnter-VarsityPress. 1986). p. 160.

psychological fulfillment, or of social transformation, or of spiritual blessing, or of all three) by any other means. That destroys the power of these false savior-kings over us. The declaration of the gospel of grace is therefore always a declaration of the kingdom. A new savior is a new king. For example. Paul says that Peter's racism was "not in line with the *truth of the gospel*" (Gal.2:14). If we are saved by grace alone--but we continue to be racists, we continue to bow to a false savior-king; we continue to look to our race and culture to justify ourselves over others. But the gospel is the gospel of Christ's **kingdom**. The reversal of the cross, the grace of God, tears down our pride and thus liberates us from bondage to other powers in our lives and our society.

Sum: Second, we see that the gospel of free grace is necessarily a 'gospel of the **kingdom**' which effects the way we live in society and in the world. The gospel is not just (as is often thought) the message of how you can get individual forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus. But we cannot separate this second 'perspective' from the first. If we are not saved wholly by Christ (not ourselves) then the **kingdom** of God is not good news! It is not good news to be told. simply: "God has created a mini-society of freedom and justice based on his laws. Join up!" That would make the message of Christianity a burdensome one of instruction on how to live (Perspect #1) not a message of grace. But also, separated from the other perspectives, the **kingdom** of God would simply never 'work'. What makes people able to change their **mindset** from 'worldly' to '**kingdom**' is the existential experience of justification and sonship (Perspect #3), not just being told to live unselfishly.

- Faith vs. Works-Performance ("THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION Eph. 1:13)  
The 'existential' perspective: In whom does it happen?

While the gospels (especially the 'Synoptics'--Matthew, Mark. and Luke) stress the gospel of the **kingdom**, the epistles. and especially those of Paul, show how it is additionally "the gospel of *your salvation*" (Eph.1:13).

Paul. better than any other Biblical writer, explores the meaning of the 'gospel of Christ' for the individual believer. First, he tells us that the gospel is *the* way that the work of salvation proceeds in our lives. The gospel is (lit.) "*the power of God into salvation for everyone who believes*" (Rom.1:16). The gospel does not just come with power. but it actually is God's saving power **In verbal form**. As nearly all students of the Bible agree, the word 'salvation' cannot be confined to the past tense only. There is a strong tendency to think of 'salvation' as simply the freedom from the penalty of sin we receive the moment we first believe. But though the Bible says that Christians have been saved (Rom.10:9,13) once they believe, it also says that they "*are being*" saved (2 Cor.2:15), and that some day we "*shall be saved*" (Rom.5:9,10). Theologians have neatly explained this by saying that "we have been saved from the penalty of sin. we are being saved from the power of sin. and we will be saved from the very presence of sin." But for our purposes we have to ask--when Paul says that the gospel is the very power of God "for salvation", is he only talking of the limited sense of freedom from the **penalty** of sin? Is he suggesting that some other power will be the basis for our salvation from the power and the presence of sin? That is not likely. Paul is telling us that the gospel is how we are saved. through and through.

Secondly. he tells us that the gospel "reveals **a righteousness from God**" (Rom. 1:17). Here and in Galatians 2 Paul specifically identifies the gospel with the teaching that we receive not just pardon and forgiveness but also the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor.5:21). This is received by faith in the finished work of Christ. not by good works or our merit.

If we think of the gospel as only pardon or forgiveness of sins, we will trust in God for our past salvation. but will trust in our own present **strivings** and attainments for our present relationship with God. But the "*hope of the gospel*" (Col.1:23) is that **now he has reconciled you by Christ's body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free**

from accusation." (Col. 1:22). The gospel offers not just forgiveness for our bad record, but also complete acceptance through Christ's perfect record. Christ did not only die in our place but lived a perfect life in our place. Therefore we do not simply get forgiveness for sins from Christ, but also complete acceptance. His perfect past and record now (in God's sight) becomes ours.

Thus the entire Christian life is a life "lived (in a continual present progressive) by faith in the Son of **God**, who loved *me* and gave *himself for me*." (Gal. 2:20). On the one hand, this certainly means we can only enter a relationship with God by the deliberate act of trusting in his work and rejecting any trust in our own. (Rom. 4:5--Now to the one who does not work, *but trusts* God who *justifies* the wicked, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.) But, on the other hand, (as the present progressive of Gal. 2:20 indicates) we must continually remind ourselves of our status as legally righteous, adopted children of God. Galatians is written to Christians who are losing their grip on the doctrine of free justification and may be 'returning to the bondage' (Gal. 5:1) to false savior-gods (Gal. 4:8). Whenever we lose our grip on the gospel of salvation-by-faith-not-works, and we fall back into some form of works-righteousness, we return to fear and bondage.

### The Importance of All the Perspectives

These three perspectives are important to "keep together". There are today different 'parties' that have isolated and focused on one aspect of the gospel--this usually leads to difficulties and imbalances. The 'classic evangelical' position is 'the gospel of Christ'--which all by itself leads to a ministry almost strictly of apologetics, evangelism, and discipleship. The implications for worship: a very **sermon/teaching** oriented service. This is the position of the evangelical world of the last 50 years. If you 'came up' in Inter-Varsity or Campus Crusade, or in one of the older confessional churches or independent Bible churches--that is what you heard.

The 'progressive evangelical' position is the 'gospel of the kingdom'--which all by itself leads to a ministry mainly of community-building and social justice. The implications for worship: often more liturgical. This position is gaining a lot of steam, and is uniting former liberals, who are recognizing the bankruptcy former way, and former classical evangelicals, who are recognizing the individualism of their former ways. This group is strong at seeing the church as a 'counter-culture' modeling the kingdom, and strong on calls to engage with modern culture. The problem is--they often reject the very idea of legal, forensic justification (as too individualistic). I wonder if that might not lead to a 'communal' legalism in the end. Will calls to join the 'reign of God' lead anyone to sing 'my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee?'"

The 'revivalist evangelical' position is the 'gospel of sonship'. Among charismatics and others in the revival tradition (since Jonathan Edwards)--there this basic idea. Most of the time, the Christian church is moribund and lacks the power of the Spirit. In times of revival, however, the nominalism, legalism, and works-righteousness of the church falls away and there is a recapture of the gospel of free justification and **sonship**. Then Christians are renewed, as they recapture their identity as children of God, and **non-Christians** are attracted in. This position--all by itself, leads to a ministry emphasizing prayer, personal renewal, and lots of personal counseling. The implications for worship: often more on the charismatic, contemporary, informal style. **This** view has historically been in tension with both the classic view (which sees it as too oriented to 'feelings') and the kingdom view (which sees it as too individualistic).

But not **only** should these perspectives be 'combined'--it must be seen that they interpenetrate and contain one another. Put another way: if you push down deep enough into any of the perspectives, you find the other two! For example: if you push down into the gospel of **sonship** far enough, you will discover that we need to care for the poor. My new identity in Christ, when perfected, must remove class pride **and** racism. For another example: if you push down into

the gospel of the kingdom far enough, you will see that the cross does not only liberate from the power of social idols, but personal idols, which are always rooted in self-righteousness.

In the last few years, a version of the 'revivalist tradition' has taken shape within the Reformed evangelical community in the 'Sonship' course out of New Life Presbyterian from Jack and Rose Marie Miller. Nearly all the criticism I have read or heard has come from persons who are more at home in the other two perspectives. Most of us are 'in reaction', and many of the people who have found the Sonship teaching liberating are people who may have been in more conservative churches (with the new birth emphasis) or more liberal churches (with the kingdom emphasis) who did not really 'get' the gospel until they heard the Luther-Pauline-Jack Miller focus on imputed righteousness and grasping your adoption in Christ. The danger, of course, is to write off the other two perspectives only because they were not your pathways down into the gospel riches. The "Sonship" course is almost completely focused on personal individual renewal--because that is its purpose. The problem comes when we think "this, and only this, is the gospel."

So What is the Gospel?

You may notice that I haven't put the 'gospel in a nutshell' through this whole paper! That is not because it cannot be done. Some people want to assure us that 'the whole Bible' is the gospel. And while it is certainly commendable and right to say that the main theme of the whole Bible is always the gospel, it is not very practical to make this declaration. A person must believe the gospel to be rightly related to God (Mark 1:14-15). Does that mean a person has to know everything in the Bible in order to be saved?

The Bible does put the gospel in a nutshell often, but it puts it into many different 'nutshells'. See 2 Cor.5:19-21 (my favorite) or Mark 1:14-15; John 16:33b; Rom.1:1-4, 16-17; 1 Cor.15:1-5; Phil.2:5-11; 1 Tim.2:5-6; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 1:8-2:1; 3:8b; 5:1; Rev.5:9-10. Each nutshell stresses a different 'perspective'. It is therefore somewhat risky for a church to take just one 'nutshell' and standardize it as the way to always share the gospel with someone. It tends to reduce your church to being either a doctrinalist, pietist, or culturalist church. I am not against teaching lay people to share their faith with one presentation. But I am wary of making one presentation the unique way a community hears the gospel over and over. We should recognize the different perspectives.

What, though, do all the nutshells have in common? They all tell us that--

#### *Gospels 'Pieces'*

1. In the life and work of Jesus Christ in history,
2. God achieved for us a total salvation that we could not achieve for ourselves, and
3. That must be received by faith alone.

The 'pieces' of every Gospel presentation include a God who provides salvation, a human condition that requires salvation, a Savior that secures salvation, and a response from us that receives it.

*'We need to remind ourselves from **time to time** that there are truths related to **this** gospel message **that** are not themselves the gospel....Preaching predestination or creation or ~~the~~ **new birth** or the **baptism of the Spirit** **is** not preaching the **gospel**. All these things are related to the gospel and are **necessary** for the working of the gospel, but **they** are not the essential message to be believed for salvation...**Only the** message that another **true and obedient human being** has come on **o w** behalf, that he has **lived** for us the kind of **life** we should live but can't, that he has **paid fully** the penalty we deserve for the **life** we do lwe*

*but shouldn't--only this message can give assurance that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>36</sup>*

## Two Gospel Nutshells

### A kingdom perspective

The 'gospel' is the good news that through Christ the power of God's kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. When we believe and rely on Jesus' work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship to God, that kingdom power comes upon us and begins to work through us.

### An experiential perspective

Irreligion is avoiding **God** as Lord and Savior by ignoring him. Religion is avoiding God as Lord and Savior by developing a moral record and giving it to God thinking that then he owes you. But the gospel is not that we provide to **him** a moral record, so that then he owes us. but that **he** provides a perfect record to **us**--the Son of God. Jesus Christ came and lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. taking the penalty for our sin --all and gives it to us. so that then we owe him. How do we receive it? We must say: 1) "God--please accept and relate to me because of what Jesus has done for me, not because of how I have lived", and 2) "because he gave himself utterly for me. I now offer myself utterly to you, to serve you unconditionally."

## THE GOSPEL AS A STORY

### THE IMPORTANCE OF "STORY"

- What is a story? It is the recounting of a conflict or tension between opposing forces and their subsequent resolution or non-resolution. "Little Red Riding Hood took her grandmother some goodies" is not a story. "Little Red Riding Hood was taking her grandmother some goodies, but then a wolf came to her door..." immediately becomes a story.
- Pre-modern times- Story is the way to a) form community (we are only a community if we are in the same story) and to b) form character (we only understand virtue if we 'see' them embodied in stories). Conservative thinkers are calling us back to see the importance of 'story', criticizing the Enlightenment over-love of abstraction and 'truth' put into propositional forms and principles. 'Moral education' in schools is a failure for this reason. See **A.MacIntyre, S.Hauerwas**,
- Post-modern- Story is the way all meaning is organized. There are no objective truths that **we** only 'discover'. Rather, every culture creates its own truth by generating a narrative with a 'plot' and 'characters' consisting of oppositional relationships which define 'same-ness' and 'other-ness'. (Structuralism) Deconstruction (a term coined by Derrida) is a process that demonstrates the fundamental 'story' character of claims to so-called objective truth. Derrida **wants** to show that meaning is fundamentally undecidable. See Claude Levi-Strauss. Roland **Barthes**, Jacques **Derrida**.
- For extremely different reasons, there is a **surprising** new consensus about the enormous power of story and narrative for social and personal identity and meaning. Example: Commentators on Sept 11 who were trying to answer the question 'what does this mean?' each had to spin out a narrative structure--a story--and then put the attack in that story.
  - Narrative #1- "America's sins are finally coming home to it". Left and **Right** versions. America is the antagonist and the world's oppressed are the pro-agonizers. Or America's culture is **the** villain and God is removing the protection to teach us a lesson.
  - Narrative #2 - "**We** are Good and they are Evil". Moderately liberal and moderately conservative versions. We are the good--where individuals have freedom to live as they

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<sup>36</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2000 )p.83-84.

choose--and they are evil because they are violent and oppress people, especially women.

- Narrative #3 - "Through all this death there can be a resurrection". Despite the horror, we can become a better city than we were before. We can become a better country than we were before. We can be both humbler as Americans and yet prouder to be Americans. The destruction is as much the antagonist as the terrorists, and the 'victory' of the protagonist is not simply military but more complex and spiritual.

## THE POWER OF STORY

- So recent thinkers have 'recovered' the importance and power of story. But they cannot really account for it. The Left is right in revealing that every authority and power exercises **itself** through story and narrative. Conservatives are right in pointing out that community and character are impossible without stories. But *why* is story so important?
- As we will see below western 20th century Christians lost sight of the power of story along with everyone else. But we should have known better. It is in the very heart of the English word "Gospel".
  - The English word "gospel" comes from the Middle English word "Godspell" which derives from two old English words--"good" and "spell" [*story*]. In Old English, 'to tell a story' was 'to cast a spell'! And we all know of the power of a great story to almost literally 'cast a spell' on us. Speakers long ago learned that almost the only thing that listeners can remember about their speeches is the stories they tell, not that propositions or principles they declare. Stories capture the heart and imagination and give us deep sadness and joy. Obviously, ancient people knew more than we about the power of stories to shape how people feel, think, and live.
  - The Gospel, then was **The** Goodspell--the most greatest of all stories with the ultimate power possible. It was the story that casts the ultimate spell of joy and changes your whole life. It was **the** story that all other joy-bringing, spell-casting, heart-shaping stories only pointed to.
- J.R.R. Tolkien, a professor of Old English (Anglo-Saxon), lays this out in an essay ("On Fairy Stories"). C.S. Lewis lays this out in "Myth Became Fact". The essence of their theme: Stories have power because they are telling us the **truth**, even though the stories are fiction. (They aren't 'true', factually.) The stories seem to point to some underlying 'reality' which is even hard to put into words or propositions or definitions. Arthur Danto said "Art is *getting across indefinable, but inescapable meaning*". Stories resonate deeply because they witness to the fact that deep down we know some things are important and true and right and good. that there is meaning and hope and glory--lasting, inexorable good. But the stories point to it and evoke it but they don't define it. However, in the gospel story, of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have the 'myth that became a fact'. The Jesus story is not one more myth pointing to the underlying reality, but it is the underlying reality to which all the stories point.

*This| consolation, the joy...the sudden joyous 'turn': this joy which...stories can produce supremely well. is not essentially 'escapist' nor 'fugitive'...It is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of **dyscatastrophe**, of sorrow and failure. Indeed, the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance. Rather, it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat, and thus is **evangelium**, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. It is the mark of a good story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give... when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality. In...the "turn"...we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through"*

We live in the first era of history that considers 'happy endings' to be works of inferior art. Fairy tales are considered for children only. Why? The modern world is sure that ultimate reality is not expressed through a happy ending. Life is *not* like that! Life is full of brokenness and paradox and irony and frustration. (Steven Spielberg was refused Oscars until he stopped making movies with happy endings!) But this view--that 'happy ending' fairy tales are only for children who don't know better--was never the case until recently. When we read ancient fantasies, romances, and fairy-stories, we see that they are far too frightening for children. Tolkien recognized that Fairy-stories originally were written and read because they had a very unique and peculiar effect on the reader. He refuses to call them 'escapist'. Later in the essay, he shows his hand.

*"This joy'.. .merits more consideration The peculiar quality of the 'joy' in a successful Fantasy can...be explained as a sudden glimpse of an underlying...Reality...The Gospels contain...a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain...the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered history and the primary world....The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story ends in joy...There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath...[T]his story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is Lord. of angels, and of men--and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused*

*But in God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed Man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The Evangelium has not abrogated legends--it has hallowed them'...It has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature.*

In no way is the gospel story 'saccharine' or sentimental. The 'happy ending' of the resurrection is so enormous, that it swallows up even the Cross. It is so great, that it can admit the depth of the sorrow and brokenness of life. It has taken it seriously on the cross. Indeed, the gospel story takes evil and loss more seriously than anyone else, because it says that we cannot save ourselves. Nothing short of the death of the very Son of God can save us. But the resurrection makes even the Cross meaningful. The gospel is the ultimate story that shows victory coming out of defeat. of strength coming out of weakness. of life coming out of death, of rescue from beyond hope. Therefore, the gospel story is the only story that every person *must* believe in order to get the joy unspeakable **and** full of glory. If we disbelieve the gospel. and we weep at the happy ending of some story, we will slowly sour, because our minds tell us "life is not really like that". But if we believe the gospel. then we both make stories and take in stories with even greater wonder, mirth, and joy. Our hearts slowly heal as we make and listen to **and** weep at stories (both tragedies and fairy-tales!) because we know 'life is like that--because of Him!' Then even our griefs. even the 'dyscatastrophes', we know will be taken up into the miraculous grace of God's purposes. just as the dyscatastrophe of the cross is taken up into the resurrection.

### STORY AND THE GOSPEL

- First, we must be careful when putting the gospel 'in a nutshell'. Because the gospel is by grace it is a story. Salvation cannot be a story if it is by works. If salvation is by what *we* do. then it comes in the form of principles. or instruction. But since salvation is by grace through the actions of God in history, the gospel is not just principles--it is a story about what *he* has done. In the 20th century. Christians have tried very hard to 'de-story' the

gospel by putting it into 'laws' or principles. I'm not against having a 'gospel outline', but that is only going to be effective as the 'summary' after hearing the story. It is the story of Christ that will 'cast the spell'.]

- On the other hand, it is also a mistake to think that it doesn't matter if the gospel story is true or not. While some Christians have over-rationalized (de-storied) the gospel, now there are many Christians that are trying to over-mystify the gospel. They say we must just tell the story and let it effect people. Especially they are against any efforts to prove the historicity of the gospels. But while the gospel of grace (not works) demands that the message of salvation be a story, it also demands that it be a true story. In a religion of works, the old stories of the faith don't have to be true. Why not? What saves you is what you do. What saves you is how you "live like Buddha" or "live like Muhammed". The stories "work" as exemplars, whether they occurred or not. But the gospel is that Jesus saved us by what he did. If that is the case, the story of the gospel only 'works'--it only saves us--if it really happened. If Jesus' death and resurrection didn't happen (Paul says) we are still in our sins. If they didn't happen, they are just examples for us so we can lead a sacrificial life of service.
- Therefore, the gospel of grace vs. works avoids the over rationalization OR the over-mystification of the faith that comes with legalism and self-salvation. We are saved by (and changed by) faith in a story--but it is faith in a true story.
- The concept of the gospel as the 'Good Story' has enormous implications for Christian artists--and not just those that write plays, novels, and stories. As Tolkien hints--art does not just heal us when it is directly telling us the gospel story. The gospel has "hallowed all art" and *all* stories, in a sense. All effective art, that tells us about indefinable but inescapable meaning, is 'hallowed' by the gospel! This goes as much for music as more directly narrative art forms, I think. cf. Bernstein's remarks about Beethoven's Fifth.
- The concept of the gospel as the 'Good Story' has enormous implications for communicating the gospel in every culture. Lamin Sanneh Translating the Message insists that only Christianity does not decimate an indigenous culture's story, but rather a) enters it. b) cleanses it of distortions, demonic and idolatrous elements, and c) resolves its unresolved story lines in Christ. See 1 Cor 1:22-25. Jesus is the power that Jewish culture sought and it is the wisdom that Greek culture sought. Christianity in every culture is somewhat different, because Jesus was God who became truly human. Sanneh cf. Christianity with modernity, Islam (totalizing metanarratives), post-modernity (no metanarratives), and the gospel. This again has implications for artists, because it shows how Christianity tends to transform and resolve rather **than** simply oppose different cultures.



## APPLYING CHRIST

## CHAPTER 4 -

## WHY? A THEOLOGY OF APPLICATION

## INTRODUCTION

The historic Protestant doctrine is that we are not only *justified* by faith rather than our works, but we are also *sanctified* by faith rather than our works. Yet very few ministers know how Christ's *finished* work is the dynamic and guide for growth into holy character.

## MORALISM VS. SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH.

## 1. The distinctiveness of sanctification by faith

Excerpts from G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification (Eerdmans, 1952)

The ancient feud of Rome with the *Sola-fide* doctrine, based as it is on the view that *Sola-fide* is subversive of *sanctification*, must be called Rome's most fundamental error. It was no other than *Sola-fide* which made clear the *true significance* of sanctification, and distinguished it from all moralistic effort at *self-improvement...*" p.14.

'Wesley admitted *full* acceptance of the *Sola-fide* doctrine. [But] one may accept the doctrine and then fail to do justice to it.... One can assume it as one's starting point, as did Wesley, and subsequently view the process of *sanctification* in terms of a dynamic *category*--a *power* plus its *effects*--without taking account of the bearings which faith always sustains toward divine grace. *Sola-fide* becomes a *point* of departure and breaks its connection with *sanctification*.... When the *victory* of *Christ* is lost sight of, *the warfare* degenerates into *self-reliant activism*...it is on the *road* to making *sanctification* independent from *justification*." pp.52. 63

Luther and Calvin taught that not only was justification by faith in Christ's work--not ours, but *sanctification* is also by faith in Christ's work, not ours. In practice, however, nearly every evangelical teaches that: 1) we are justified by faith in Christ's work, and 2) we are sanctified by trying very, very hard to live according to Biblical principles (with the Holy Spirit's help, of course). Berkouwer insists that it is not salvation by grace, but sanctification by grace which is the biggest difference between the Reformers and the Catholic church and between the Reformers and later Methodism (Wesley) and much of Protestantism today.

## 2. The general relationship of justification to sanctification.

Excerpts from G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification (Eerdmans, 1952)

'Orientation' "Genuine sanctification--let it be repeated--stands or falls with this continued orientation toward justification and the remission of sins...too often the *bond* between sanctification and *Sola-fide* was neglected and the impression created that sanctification was the *humanly* operated successor to the *divinely* worked justification." p.78.]

'Feeding' "Holiness is never a 'second blessing' placed next to the blessing of justification....The exhortation which comes to the Church is that it *must* live in faith out of *this fullness*: not that it must *work for* a second blessing, but that it must *feed* on the first blessing, the forgiveness of sins. *The warfare* of the Church...springs from the demand to really live from this first *blessing*." p.64.

"Commerce" "The believer's constant 'commerce' with the forgiveness of sins and his continued dependence on it must--both in pastoral counseling and in [teaching]--be laid bare, emphasized, and kept in sight. Faith preserves us from autonomous self-sanctification and moralism" p.84, 93

⌈ Berkouwer says that it is a mistake to ask: "we know we have imputed righteousness, but now how to we move on to actual righteousness?" We do not "move on". Any particular flaw in our actual righteousness stems from a corresponding failure to orient ourselves toward our imputed righteousness. Sanctification happens to the degree that we "feed on" or "orient to" or "have commerce with" the pardon, righteousness, and new status we now have in Christ, imputed through faith.⌋

3. *The practical relationship of justification to sanctification.* *What is a Communion web site.*  
Excerpts from Martin Luther. *Treatise Concerning Good Works* (1520)

There **is** not one in a thousand who does not set his confidence upon the works, expecting by them to win God's favor and anticipate His grace; and so they make a fair of them, a thing which God cannot endure, since He has promised His grace freely, and wills that we begin by trusting that grace, and in it perform all works, whatever they may be..(Part IX).

"All those who do not at all times trust God and do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death trust in His favor, grace **and** good-will. but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment, and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, fasting, obedience, patience, chastity, and innocence of all the saints combined. For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham. show and pretense, with nothing back of them... If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and **is** pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior].." (Part X. XI)

"This faith, faithfulness, confidence deep in the heart, is the true fulfilling of the First Commandment. Without **this** there is no other work that **is** able to satisfy **this** Commandment. **And as** this Commandment is the very first, highest and best, from which all the others proceed, in which they exist, and by which they are directed and measured so also its work, that is, the faith or confidence in God's favor at all times. is the very first highest and best, from which all others must proceed, exist, remain, be directed and measured...(Part IX)

"Note for yourself, then, how far apart these two are: keeping the First Commandment with outward works only. and keeping it with inward **trust** For this last makes true. living children of God, the other **only** makes worse idolatry and the most mischievous hypocrites on earth..." (XII)

⌈ All people sin in general because we are sinners. but why do we sin in any particular instance? Luther--any sin is rooted in the inordinate lust for something which comes because we **are** trusting in that thing rather than in Christ for our righteousness or salvation. Therefore. in sin we are always 'forgetting' what God has done for us in Christ and instead are being moved by some idol. Luther says that to fail to believe God accepts us fully in Christ and to look to something else is a failure to keep the first commandment--love *God* with all the heart. Thus beneath **any** particular sin is the general sin of rejecting Christ-salvation and indulging in **self-salvation.**⌋

Excerpt from the *Belgic Confession* Chapter 24

"We believe that this **true** faith. being wrought in **man** by **the** hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, **and** freeing him from the bondage of sin Therefore it is so far from being true that his justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on **the** contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God. but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore. it **is** impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a

vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a 'faith working through love,' which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word....We would always be in doubt tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually vexed & they relied not on **the** merits of our Savior."

Unless we believe the gospel, we will be driven in all we do--whether obeying or disobeying--by pride ('self-love') or fear (of 'damnation'). Apart from 'grateful remembering' of the gospel, all good works are done then for sinful motives. Mere moral effort, may restrain the heart, but does *not* truly change the heart. Moral effort merely 'jury rigs' the evil of the heart to produce moral behavior. out of self-interest. It is only a matter of time before such a thin tissue collapses.

## MORALISM VS. GOSPEL VIRTUE

### 1. The 'Splendor' or Common Virtue and its Weakness

*Excerpts from Jonathan Edwards.* Abridged and paraphrased, from *Charity and Its Fruits*, in vol.8, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. P.Ramsey (Yale, 1989) and *Religious Affections*, in vol.2, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. J.Smith (Yale. 1959)

'A result of 'faith working by love' is freedom On this basis, obedience is called "evangelical" (gospel-based)--the obedience of children to a Father, done with love **and** delight, as opposed to legalistic, slavish and forced. God is now chosen for his own sake; holiness is chosen for its own sake. **and** for God's sake. (CF, p.182)

'No matter how many **our** acts of justice, generosity and devotion, there **is** really nothing given to God...if God **is** not **the** end (or ultimate aim) in what is given. If your aim is the gaining of reputation and love, then the gift was offered to your reputation. If your aim **is** the profit **and** comfort then the gift was offered to your profit...Indeed, in such cases the gifts are but an offering to some idol....It **is** true that by doing great things something is worshipped, but it **is** not God..(CF, p.180-81)

'Those whose affection to God **is** founded first on his profitableness to them only regard God to the limit of **the** good things he does to meet their desires...But in *gracious* gratitude, Christians are affected by God's goodness and free grace, not only as it benefits them but as infinitely glorious in itself...' (RA, p.243, 248)

What makes people honest? generous? Jonathan Edwards tackled this over the years in his *Miscellanies* and then in his moral philosophy works; *Charity and Its Fruits*, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, **and** *The Nature of True Virtue*. He also says many relevant things about this in *Religious Affections*. The following is my summary of his "gist".

There are two kinds of moral behavior: "common virtue" and "true virtue" **Let's** take one virtue: honesty. 'Common' honesty is developed two ways. 1) First it can be inspired **by** *fear*. There is the secular version--'be honest--it pays!' or "if you are not honest, society not work". There is also the religious version-- 'if you are not honest, God will punish you!' These are all versions of the same motive. namely. that it is impractical to be honest. 2) Second, it can be inspired by *pride*. There is the secular conservative version--"don't be like those **terrible** dishonest people who hurt **others** have no virtue!" or the secular liberal version--"don't be like these greedy people who don't work *for* the common good". There **is** also the religious version--"don't be like these sinners, these bad people. Be a good godly person". These are all versions of the same motive. namely, that I am better **than** these people who lie.

Edwards is by no means scornful of common virtue. Indeed, he believes in the 'splendor of common morality' (Paul Ramsay), **which** is the main **way** Cod restrains evil in the world. He

does call it virtue and not sham. Nevertheless, there is a profound tension at the heart of common virtue. We just said that the main reason people are honest is due to fear and pride. But what is the main reason we are dishonest? Why do we lie? Almost always--it is our of fear or pride. So in common virtue, you have not done anything to root out the fundamental causes of evil. In 'common honesty' you have restrained the heart, but not changed the heart. You are doing an ingenious form of judo on yourself. (Judo depends on using the enemy's forward motion against him.) You have 'jury-rigged' heart so that the basic causes of dishonesty are being used to make yourself honest. But this is quite a fragile condition. At some point you will find that honesty is not practical nor humiliating and you will do it. Then you will be shocked. You will say, I was not raised to do such a thing"

But the reason you did, was that all your life, through the sermons and moral training you had, you were nurturing the roots of sin within your moral life. This is true whether you grow up in a liberal-moral environment or a conservative-moral environment. The roots of evil are alive and well and protected underneath your moral-behavior progress. And some day they erupt and show themselves and we are shocked.

## 2. The roots of 'True Virtue' and its Nurture

Luther told us that the essence of every sin is a desire to be one's own Savior and Lord in some particular way. It is to set up some idol which is the real way you are going to save yourself. It may even be a very 'religious idol' (cf. Judges 17:1-13). It may be a very religious life, but at the heart it is a way of using God as an object, rather than adoring him as being beautiful for who he is in himself. It is using obedience to God to achieve comfort, security, self-worth/status--therefore our 'virtue' is self-centered and conditional. Its a form of bargaining. It is using our virtue to put God in our debt--he now owes us. He must give us salvation and blessing. Therefore, our obedience is a way to save ourselves and control God. Edwards (see above quote #2) also understands 'common virtue' as an idolatrous effort at self-salvation, rather than a response to grace (see above quote #3) in which God is adored for his sheer beauty.

So Edwards says--what is true virtue? It is when you are honest not because it profits you or makes feel better, but only when you are smitten with the beauty of the God who is truth and sincerity and faithfulness! It is when you come to love truth telling not for your sake but for God's sake and its own sake. But it particularly grows by a faith-sight of the glory of Christ and his salvation. How does 'true honesty' grow? It grows when I see him dying for me, keeping a promise he made despite the infinite suffering it brought him. Now that a) destroys pride on the one hand, because he had to do this for me--I am so lost! But that also b) destroys fear on the other hand, because if he'd do this for me while I'm an enemy, then he values me infinitely, and nothing I can do will wear out his love for me. Then my heart is not just restrained by changed. It's fundamental orientation is transformed.

## 3. Thomas Chalmers on Moralism vs. Gospel Virtue.

*'The Expulsive Power of a New Affection', from The Works of Thomas Chalmers (New York: Robert Carter. 1830) vol. II*

*The object of the gospel is both to pacify the sinner's conscience and to purify the heart, and it is of importance to observe that what mars the one of these objects mars the other also. The best way of casting out an impure affection is to admit a pure one....Thus it is that the freer the Gospel, the more sanctifying the Gospel. The more it is received as a doctrine of grace, the more it will be felt as a doctrine [leading to godliness]...*

*On the tenure of "do this and you will live", a spirit of fearfulness is sure to enter: and the jealousies of a legal bargain chase away all confidence of intimacy between God and man: and the creature striving to be square and even with his Creator is, in fact pursuing all the while his*

own selfishness instead of God's glory. With all the conformities which he labors to accomplish, the soul of obedience is not there, the mind is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed under such an economy can it ever be. **It is only when, as in the Gospel, acceptance is bestowed as a present, without money and without price, that the security which man feels in God is placed beyond the reach of disturbance. Only then can he repose in Him as one friend reposes in another...the one party rejoicing over the other to do him good...in the impulse of a gratitude, by which he is awakened to the charms of a new moral existence.**

Salvation by grace, **salvation by free grace, salvation not by works but according to the mercy of God is indispensable...to...godliness. Retain a single shred or fragment of legality with the Gospel...and you take away the power of the Gospel to melt and conciliate. For this purpose, the freer it is, the better it is. That very peculiarity which so many dread as the germ of Antinomianism [lawlessness], is, in fact, the germ of a new spirit, and a new inclination against it.**

Along with the light of a free Gospel, does there enter the love of the Gospel, which in proportion as you impair the freeness, you are sure to chase away. And never does the sinner find within himself so mighty a moral transformation, as when under the belief that he is saved by grace, he feels constrained thereby to offer his heart a devoted thing, and to deny ungodliness.

[Why is this grateful love so important?] It is seldom that any of our [bad habits or flaws] disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning...or by the force of mental determination. But what cannot be destroyed may be dispossessed--and one taste may be made to give way to another, **and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection in the mind.**

It is thus that the boy ceases at length to be a slave of his appetite, but it is because a [more 'mature'] taste has brought it into subordination. The youth ceases to idolize [sensual] pleasure, but it is because the idol of **wealth has...gotten the ascendancy. Even the love of money can cease to have mastery over the heart because it is drawn into the whirl of [ideology and politics] and he is now lorded over by a love of power [and moral superiority]. But there is not one of these transformations in which the heart is left without an object. Its desire for one particular object is conquered--but its desire to have some object...is unconquerable....**

**The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one...It is only...when admitted into the number of God's children, through faith in Jesus Christ, that the spirit of adoption is poured out on us--it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires, and the only way that deliverance is possible.**

**Thus...it is not enough...to hold out to the world the mirror of its own imperfections. It is not enough to come forth with a demonstration of the evanescent character of your enjoyments...to speak to the conscience...of its follies....Rather, try every legitimate method of finding access to your hearts for the love of Him who is greater than the world.**

## MORALISM VS. CHRIST-CENTERED EXPOSITION.

We alluded above to the fact that Christ-centered exposition is very directly linked to Christ-centered Application. **It is possible to expound Christ and fail to do Christ-centered application, but it is impossible to do Christ-centered application in a sermon if you have not first done Christ-centered exposition.**

For example, look at the story of David and Goliath. What is the meaning of that narrative for us? Without reference to Christ, the story may be (usually is!) preached as: "*The bigger they come, the harder they'll fall, if you just go into your battles with faith in the Lord.* You may not be *real big and powerful* in yourself, but with God on your side, you can overcome *giants.*" But as soon as we ask: how is David foreshadowing the work of his greater Son"? We begin to see the same features of the story in a different light. The story is telling us that the Israelites can *not* go up against Goliath. They can't do it. They need a substitute. When David goes in on their behalf, he is not a full-grown man, but a vulnerable and weak figure, a mere boy. He goes virtually as a sacrificial lamb. But God uses his apparent weakness as the means to destroy the giant, and David becomes Israel's champion-redeemer, so that his victory will be imputed to them. They get all the fruit of having fought the battle themselves.

This is a fundamentally different meaning than the one that arises from the non-Christocentric reading. There is, in the end, only two ways to read the Bible: is it basically about me or basically about Jesus? In other words, is it basically about what I must do, or basically about what he has done? If I read David and Goliath as basically giving me an example, then the story is really about me. I must summon up the faith and courage to fight the giants in my life. But if I read David and Goliath as basically showing me salvation through Jesus, then the story is really about him. Until I see that Jesus fought the real giants (sin, law, death) for me. I will never have the courage to be able to fight ordinary giants in life (suffering, disappointment, failure, criticism, hardship). For example how can I ever fight the 'giant' of failure, unless I have a deep security that God will not abandon me? If I see David as my example, the story will never help me fight the failure/giant. But if I see David/Jesus as my substitute, whose victory is imputed to me, then I can stand before the failure/giant. As another example, how can I ever fight the 'giant' of persecution or criticism? Unless I can see him forgiving me on the cross, I won't be able to forgive others. Unless I see him as forgiving me for falling asleep on him (Matt.27:45) I won't be able to stay awake for him.

In the Old Testament we are continually told that our good works are not enough, that God has made a provision. This provision is pointed to at every place in the Old Testament. We see it in the clothes God makes Adam and Even in Genesis, to the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs, to the Tabernacle and the whole sacrificial system, to the innumerable references to a Messiah, a suffering servant, and so on. Therefore, to say that the Bible is about Christ is to say that the main theme of the Bible is the gospel--Salvation is of *the* Lord (Jonah 2:9).

So reading the Old Testament Christocentrically is not just a "additional" dimension. It is not something you can just tack on to the end of a study and sermon. ("Oh, and by the way, this also points us to Christ".) Rather, the **Christocentric** reading provides a fundamentally different application and meaning to the text. Without relating it to Christ, the story of Abraham and Isaac means: *'You must be willing to even kill your own son for him'* Without relating it to Christ, the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel means: *'You have to wrestle with God, even when he is inexplicable—even when he is crippling you. You must never give up.'* These 'morals-of-the-story' are crushing because they essentially are read as being about us and what we must do.

## APPLYING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 5 -

## HOW? STRATEGIES FOR APPLICATION

### INTRODUCTION

How do we 'get down to earth'--bringing a text into direct contact with the hearts and lives and practices of the listeners? And how do we do this in such a way that really changes the heart through the gospel rather through general moral exhortation? I will lay down three broad strategies for application that flow out of a Redemptive-Historical approach. Indeed, the second strategy (Aiming at Heart-Motives) flows directly out of the "Law Completion" way of Redemptive-Historical exposition.

Note: To preach the **gospel** every week is to continually put the law into a context of grace. But many people say that to constantly be striking a 'note of grace, grace, grace' is helpful for pockets of Christians who have been raised in strict and legalistic situations, but this is not the note to sound out in the general culture. The objection goes like this: "Surely Phariseism and moralism is not a problem in our culture today. Rather, our problem is license and antinomianism. People lack a sense of right or wrong. It is 'carrying coal to Newcastle' to talk about grace all the time to post-modern people. But I don't believe that is the case. Unless you provide the 'good news' of grace hand in hand with the 'bad news' of God's judgement I don't think you will successfully preach to people today. Basically, I have found, working in a very secular city, that you have to preach the gospel of free grace against legalism in order to reach anti-nomian people and create real character change.

### A. CRITIQUE RELIGION AS WELL AS IRRELIGION

One of the most important ways to get a hearing from post-modern people *and* to wake up nominal or sleepy Christians is to preach the gospel as a "third" distinct way from both irreligion and religion.

Religion is 'outside in': "if I work hard according to Biblical principles, then God will accept/bless me". The gospel is 'inside out': "because God has accepted/blessed me, I work hard to live according to Biblical principles". Religion (explicitly in other faiths and implicitly in legalistic Christianity) makes moral/religious observance a means of salvation. Even people who believe in the Christian God can functionally 'base their sanctification on their justification' (Lovelace). Thus a prime need is to distinguish between general 'religion' and gospel Christianity as well as overt irreligion. Why? (1) Many professed Christians aren't believers--they are pure 'elder brothers' (Luke 15:11ff.) and only **making** this distinction can convert them. (2) **Many**. many real Christians are elder-brotherish--angry, mechanical, superior, insecure--and only making this distinction can renew them. (3) Modern and post-modern people have rejected religion for good reasons and will only listen to Christianity if they **see** it is **different**. *Keller never uses the term 'religious' in a positive sense.*

At the heart of the gospel is the 'propitiation' of God's wrath by the substitutionary life and death of Christ, so that his children by faith no longer fear the judicial, retributive wrath of God ever again (Rom. 8:1). This cuts against not one but *two* alternatives--in NT times **terms--both** legalistic 'Pharisees' and liberal 'Sadducees'. Liberal Sadducees don't believe in a God of wrath who **needs** to be propitiated, but legalistic Pharisees don't really believe in a God whose **wrath** has been propitiated. Sadducees don't feel need to be justified: Pharisees are **trying to turn** aside God's condemnation with their own righteousness, functionally "basing their justification

*Basing justification on one's sanctification vs. the opposite is moralism.*

on their sanctification" as Richard Lovelace wrote. Sadducees are irreligious, much or most Bible not recognize as valid; Pharisees are highly religious, adding all sorts of rules and regulations to make the law of God do-able.

Legalism and leniency are therefore not just equally bad and wrong but they are basically the same thing. They are just different strategies of 'self-salvation'. Each kind of person is basically being their own Savior and Lord. In a local church, both a ministry that is loose about doctrine and winks at disobedience and sin *and* a ministry in which there is scolding and 'tightness'--lack any kind of spiritual power, authority, and joy that brings people into life change. They are both the same thing. The only way into a ministry that sees people's lives change, that brings a joy and power and electricity without authoritarianism--is a preaching of the gospel that deconstructs both legalism and leniency equally. ]

Why--this so important to reach post-modern people? One of the most important ways to get "Sadducees" to listen to a presentation of Christianity is to deconstruct Phariseeism. The way to get anti-nomians to listen to the law is to distinguish the gospel from legalism. Why? Modern and post-modern people have been rejecting Christianity for years thinking that it was indistinguishable from moralism. (And in many of its incarnations it *is* indistinguishable!) Religious people who don't understand the gospel *have* to bolster their own sense of worthiness by convincing themselves they are better than other people. This leads them to exclude and condemn others. The vast majority of people in NYC who are hostile to Christianity don't know any other kinds of churches. Only if you show them there's a difference--that what they rejected isn't real Christianity--only then will they even begin to think and listen again and give it 'one more look'.

Non-christians will always automatically hear gospel presentations as just appeals to become moral and religious--unless in your preaching you use the good news of grace against legalism.

### 1. The two "thieves" of the gospel.

Tertullian said, "Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors." Tertullian meant that there were two basic false ways of thinking, each of which "steals" the power and the distinctiveness of the gospel from us by pulling us "off the gospel line" to one side or the other. These two errors are very powerful, because they represent the natural tendency of the human heart and mind. These 'thieves' can be called *moralism* on the one hand, and or *relativism* on the other hand. (Note: Thinking in terms of the RHM, we can say that 'legalism' is an 'under-realized' eschatology in which the presence of God's future acceptance and vindication is not grasped, and anti-nomianism is an 'over-realized' eschatology in which the law and striving is not necessary.) Legalism = under-realized eschatology / Liberalism = over-realized eschatology.

Another way to put it is: the gospel opposes both *religion* and *irreligion*. On the one hand, "moralism/religion" stresses truth over grace, for it says that we must obey the truth in order to be saved. On the other hand, "relativists/irreligion" stresses grace over truth, for they say that we are all accepted by God (if there is a God) and we have to decide what is true for us. But "truth" without grace is not really truth, and "grace" without truth is not really grace. Jesus was "full of grace and truth". Any religion or philosophy of life that de-emphasizes or loses one or the other of these truths, falls into legalism or into license and either way, the joy and power and "release" of the gospel is stolen by one thief or the other. The real gospel gives us a God far more holy than a moralist can bear (since your morality is only a filthy rag before him) and far more loving than a relativist can imagine (since his love cost him dearly).

Since Paul uses a metaphor for being "in line" with the gospel, we can picture gospel renewal failing when we keep from walking 'off-line' either to the right or to the left. However, before we start we must realize that the gospel is not a half-way compromise between the two poles--it



does not produce "something in the middle", but something different from both. The gospel critiques both religion and irreligion (Matt.21:31; 22:10).

In Galatians 2:14, Paul lays down a powerful principle. He deals with Peter's racial pride and cowardice by declaring that he was not living 'not in *line with* the truth *of* the gospel". From this we see that the Christian life is a urocess of renewing every dimension of our life-- spiritual, psychological, corporate, social--bv thinking, hoping, and living out the 'lines" or ramifications of the gospel. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving. Notice. Paul did not say, "you are breaking the no-racism law!" though that is perfectly true. However, it is not the best way to think. Paul asks neither 'what is the moral way to act?" nor does he say "we don't need to order our steps at **all!**" but rather he asks: 'what is the way to live that is in-line with the gospel?" The gospel must be continually 'thought out" to keep us from moving into our habitual moralistic or individualistic directions. We must **bring everything** into line with the gospel.

The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not 'used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life. Richard Lovelace says that most people's problems are just a failure to be oriented to the gospel--a failure to grasp and believe it through and through. Luther says, "**The truth of the Gospel is the principle article of all *Christian* doctrine....Most necessary is it that *we* know this *article* well, teach it to others, **and** beat it into their **heads continually.**" (on Gal.2:14f).**

## 2. 'Two Thieves' application.

So we see that we must move away from the typical 'conservative evangelical' preaching which basically says: "Irreligion and immorality is bad: moral living is very good: Christianity is best." Of course it is better to not rob and kill, whether you are a Christian or not! But gospel preaching is careful to show the 'dark side' of morality, so that **non-Christians** (who see the dangers of religiosity and self-righteousness) **will** realize the gospel is something else, and so that Christians will not be trapped in the lifelessness of moral self-effort. The following are some examples of how to treat subjects contrasted with both irreligion and religion.

a. Approach to discouragement. When a person is depressed, the moralist says, "you are breaking the rules--repent." On the other hand, the relativist says, "you just need to love and accept yourself". But (assuming there is no physiological base of the depression!) the gospel leads us to examine ourselves and say: "something in my life has become more important than Christ, a pseudo-savior, a form of works-righteousness". The gospel leads us to repentance, but not to merely **setting** our will against **superficialities**. It is **without** the gospel that superficialities will be addressed instead of the heart. The moralist **will** work on behavior and the relativist will work on the emotions themselves.

b. Approach to love and relationships. Moralism often uses the procuring of love as **the** way to "earn our salvation" and convince ourselves we are worthy persons. That often creates what is called "co-dependency"--a form of self-salvation through needing people or needing people to need you (i.e. saving yourself by saving others). On the other hand, much **relativism/liberalism** reduces love to a negotiated partnership for mutual benefit. You only relate as long as it is not costing you anything. So the choice (without the gospel) is to selfishly use others or to selfishly let yourself be used by others. But in Christ we see a man who unconditionally **sacrificed** for us out of love for us (not need for us). When we get both the emotional-humility (who do I think I am?) and the emotional-wealth (he loves me like that!) we are moved to also humbly serve others, but not out of inappropriate need. We **do sacrifice** and commit. but not out of a need to convince ourselves or others we are **acceptable**. So we can love the person enough to confront, yet stay with the person when it does not benefit us.

c. Approach to suffering. Moralists believe that God owes them. The whole point of moralism is to put God in one's debt. So when a moralist suffers, he must **either** feel mad at God (because I have been performing well) or mad at self (because I have not been performing well)

or both. On the other hand, relativism/pragmatism feels *always* angry, claiming that God must be either unjust or impotent. But the cross shows us that we had a suffering God. But the gospel on the one hand takes away or surprise and pique over suffering. On the one hand, we see him suffering--without complaint--for us. So we know that we deserve to be eternally lost but by mercy we will never get what we deserve. This eliminates self-pity. On the other hand, we know God could not be punishing us for our sin--since Jesus paid for our sins, and God cannot receive two payments. That means whatever suffering we are receiving is not retribution. but instruction. If you face suffering with a clear grasp of justification by grace alone, your joy in that grace will deepen, but if you face suffering with a mindset of justification by works, the suffering will break you, not make you. "He suffered not that we might not suffer, but that in our suffering we could become like him." Since both the moralist and the pragmatist ignore the cross in different ways, they will both be confused and devastated by suffering.

d. Approach to sexuality. The secularist/pragmatist sees sex as merely biological and physical appetite. The moralist tends to see sex as dirty or at least a dangerous impulse that leads constantly to sin. But the gospel shows us that sexuality is to reflect the self-giving of Christ. He gave himself completely without conditions. So we are not to seek intimacy but hold back control of our lives. If we give ourselves sexually we are to give ourselves legally, socially, personally--utterly. Sex only is to happen in a totally committed, permanent relationship of marriage.

e. Approach to one's family. Moralism can make you a slave to parental expectations, while pragmatism sees no need for family loyalty or the keeping of promises and covenants if they do not "meet my needs". The gospel frees you from making parental approval an absolute or psychological salvation, pointing how God becomes the ultimate father. Then you will neither be too dependent or too hostile to your parents.

f. Approach to other races and cultures. The liberal approach is to relativize all cultures. ("We can all get along because there is no truth".) The conservatives believe there is truth for evaluation of cultures, and so they choose some culture as superior and then they idolize it, feeling superior to others in the impulse of self-justifying pride. The gospel leads us to be: a) on the one hand, somewhat critical of all cultures, including our own (since there is truth), but b) on the other hand, we are morally superior to no one. After all, we are saved by grace alone. Christians will exhibit both moral conviction yet compassion and flexibility. For example, gays are used to being "bashed" and hated or completely accepted.

g. Approach to witness to non-Christians. The liberal/pragmatist approach is to deny the legitimacy of evangelism altogether. The conservative/moralist person does believe in proselytizing, because "we are right and they are wrong". Such proselytizing is almost always offensive. But the gospel produces a constellation of traits in us. a) First, we are compelled to share the gospel out of generosity and love, not guilt. b) Second, we are freed from fear of being ridiculed or hurt by others, since we already have the favor of God by grace. c) Third, there is a humility in our dealings with others, because we know we are saved only by grace alone, not because of our superior insight or character. d) Fourth, we are hopeful about anyone, even the "hard cases", because we were saved only because of grace, not because we were likely people to be Christians. e) Fifth, we are courteous and careful with people. We don't have to push or coerce them, for it is only God's grace that opens hearts, not our eloquence or persistence or even their openness. All these traits not only create a winsome evangelist but an excellent neighbor in a multi-cultural society.

h. Approach to human authority. Moralists will tend to obey human authorities (family, tribe, government, cultural customs) too much, since they rely so heavily on their self-image of being moral and decent. Pragmatists will either obey human authority too much (since they have no higher authority by which they can judge their culture) or else too little (since they may only obey when they know they won't get caught). That means either authoritarianism or anarchy. But the gospel gives you both a standard by which to oppose human authority (if it contradicts the gospel), but on the other hand, gives you incentive to obey the civil authorities from the heart, even when you could get away with disobedience.

- i. Approach to guilt. When someone says, "I can't forgive myself", it means there is some standard or condition or person that is more central to your identity than the grace of God. God is the only God who forgives--no other "god" will. If you cannot forgive yourself, it is because you have failed your real God, your real righteousness, and it is holding you captive. The moralist's false god is usually a God of their imagination which is holy and demanding but not gracious. The pragmatist's false god is usually some achievement or relationship.
- j. Approach to self-image. Without the gospel, your self-image is based upon living up to some standards--whether yours or someone's imposed upon you. If you live up to those standards, you will be confident but not humble. If you don't live up to them, you will be humble but not confident. Only in the gospel can you be both enormously bold and utterly sensitive and humble. For you are both perfect and a sinner!
- k. Approach to "right living". Jonathan Edwards points out that "true virtue" is only possible for those who have experienced the grace of the gospel. Any person who is trying to earn their salvation does "the right thing" in order to get into heaven, or in order to better their self-esteem (etc.). In other words, the ultimate motive is self-interest. But persons who know they are totally accepted already do "the right thing" out of sheer delight in righteousness for its own sake. Only in the gospel do you obey God for God's sake, and not for what God **will** give you. Only in the gospel do you love people for their sake (not yours), do good for its own sake (not yours), and obey God for his sake (not yours). Only the gospel makes "doing the right thing" a joy and delight, not a burden or a means to an end.
- l. Approach to the poor. The liberal/pragmatist tend to scorn the religion of the poor and see them as helpless victims needing expertise. This is born out of a disbelief in God's common grace or special grace to all. Ironically, the secular **mindset** also disbelieves in sin, and thus anyone who is poor must be oppressed, a helpless victim. The **conservative/moralists** on the other hand tend to scorn the poor as failures and weaklings. They see them as somehow to blame for their situation. But the gospel leads us to be: a) humble, without moral superiority knowing you were "spiritually bankrupt" but saved by Christ's free generosity, and b) gracious, not worried too much about "deservingness", since you didn't deserve Christ's grace, c) respectful of believing poor Christians as brothers and sisters from whom to learn. Jesus himself came as a poor man. The gospel alone can bring "knowledge workers" into a sense of humble respect for and solidarity with the poor.

## B. CHALLENGE WITH THE COMFORT OF THE GOSPEL

### 1. What does it take to repent?

a. You need a sense of God's grace to repent. To truly repent, a person certainly needs humility--"emotional poverty". You must *feel* and acknowledge the guilt of what you have done and your inability to make it right by your own efforts. But full and true repentance also requires emotional 'wealth'. You need to have a hope and assurance of God's commitment to you, his love and mercy toward you. Anyone who simply despairs under sin, who says, "I'm too bad, too terrible for God or anyone to forgive me" is (ironically) guilty of unbelief. In some ways, to be either proud or despondent is to refuse to see Christ as Savior and to insist on being your own Savior. John Newton once wrote to a depressed man:

*"You say you feel overwhelmed with guilt and a sense of unworthiness...You say it is hard to understand how a holy God could accept such an awful person as yourself. You then express not only a low opinion of yourself, but also too low an opinion of the person, work, and promises of the Redeemer...You complain about your sin, but when we examine your complaints, they are so full of self-righteousness, unbelief, pride, and impatience that they are little better than the worst evils you complain of." (Letters, Vol II)*

Notice that Newton says that to **despair** of God's grace (i.e. that it is unable to forgive and receive someone as bad as you are) is really a form of self-righteousness. How so? It is a refusal to accept God's favor on the basis of mercy. A heart that says, "if I haven't *earned* it, I won't

take it as a gift!" (or that says, "if I flagellate myself for a long time, then it will atone for what I've done) is as deeply self-righteous as the heart of a proud Pharisee. It wants Jesus to be an example and a Rewarder of the Righteous, but not to be a gracious Savior.

b. You need a sense of God's grace even to become convicted. Not only that, but it is not really possible to be honest about how sinful you are unless you have the confidence that God loves you. If you base your self-image on your record and **performance**, it will be too traumatic to admit the extent of your sinfulness. You will be in denial, **rationalizing** and 'screening out' evidence of deep character flaws. Unless you believe that "the Lord's **unfailing** love surrounds" you, you will not be able to repent. It takes the good news of the gospel as much as the bad news to lead our hearts to admit what we really are.

c. The "joyful fear" of repentance. In Psalm 130:4 we read the remarkable verse: "but with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are **feared**." This is one of the most striking verses in the Bible. The Psalmist says that forgiveness, pardon, and grace leads to an increase in the "**fear**" of the Lord. What does this mean? "Servile fear [being scared] **would have been diminished not increased, by forgiveness ...**The true sense of the '**fear of the Lord**' in **the** Old Testament.. implies relationship." (DK, p.446) So this term "fear" would be best defined as: "joyful awe and wonder before the transcendent greatness of who God is". And here in Psalm 130, it is the prospect of grace and mercy that leads the author into joyful **and** humble submission. This "fear" then is paradoxical. The more we experience grace and forgiveness and love, the more we get out of ourselves, the more we bow to him in amazed, wondering submission to his greatness. When we **really** understand that we are forgiven, it does not lead to 'loose living' or independence, but to respectful surrender to his sovereignty. If we had earned our salvation, our lives would still be our own! He'd owe us something. But since our salvation is by free grace, due totally to his love, then there is nothing he cannot ask of us. We are not our own. It is the joy that brings about this submission.

## 2. *The joyful fear and preaching.*

Since **a)** we can't really even psychologically admit the magnitude of our sin if we don't know there is hope of salvation, and since **b)** self-hatred is basically a form of self-righteousness-- how does that effect preaching? When we preach, we need to challenge **with the comfort** of the gospel. Put another way-- the thing that most comforts us (**the** free, unconditional, **sacrificial** love of Jesus) should be the thing **that most** convict us. The language of preaching should not be: "unless you clean up your act, you will never get the love of God" but "how on earth can you treat this loving God like this?" The first approach is: "repent or God will drop you!" The second approach is: "repent for spurning the God whose Son died so you would never lose him!"

The first approach actually encourages self-righteousness. It tries to convict us by increasing self-centeredness, by saying, "the sinfulness of your sin is that it is going to make you unhappy! Better get rid of it or you won't be blessed." Ironically, this only gets you to hate yourself (for being a failure) and to hate the consequences of the sin ("this is going to ruin me!") rather **than** the sin itself for what it is in itself, a violation of God.

The second approach increases Christ-centeredness, saying, "the sinfulness of your sin is that it rejects the sacrificial love of Christ. He died so you wouldn't do this **sin!**" While the first approach tends toward **hating** myself rather than the sin, this approach tends to help be hate the sin rather **than** myself. If the focus is on the death of Christ for me, and of his unconditional commitment to me, then I see my own value to **him**, and **that** makes the sin far **worse!** It is trampling on his unconditional love. It is savaging the heart of the one who loved me unconditionally.

The preacher who convicts out of the comfort, who goes for 'joyful fear' instead of 'servile fear' will find that he can be extremely strong and forceful in his admonitions. This is not a

'therapeutic' approach. Paul said, "Do you not realize...that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance?" (Rom.2:4)

### 3. Convicting *with* mercy.

So how do we convict Pharisees of sin with the 'good news' of mercy and grace? You condemn them for feeling condemned! You call them to repent of not seeing and living off of the greatness of what Christ has done *for* them as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption! You say something like this: 'You are more free from condemnation than you will dare to believe. Your pride, spiritual coldness toward God and others, and anxiety proves you don't thoroughly believe the gospel. Accept his acceptance!' Convict them of joylessness.

Then how do we convict Sadducees and lawless people of sin with the 'good news' of mercy and grace? a) First, they must over-hear you convicting Pharisees with the good news! This brings them up short! They thought Christianity was all 'bad news'. Contemporary people are so therapized to believe that any kind of guilt is bad that they will immediately **shrink** from any prospect of guilt and conviction unless they can see what is on the other side. They have to hear of the sin of joylessness, of the sin of **trying** to save yourself by your good works and moral behavior. Even though they aren't trying to do this themselves, they need to see the fruitlessness of it and the sheerness of God's grace. b) Then, second we can turn the "bad news" on to the lawless listener, and they will be more open to it. We can say something like this: "You do sin--though you refuse to use the word. You know that. And you cannot reform by moral effort--you will never keep it up. Nothing less than the death of the Son of God can save you--that is how extreme your position is. But he has done it! It is finished!" Sadducees are considerably more open to even this bad news once they have seen how incredibly comforting the gospel is for people 'inside' the faith **and also** how deadly it is against the moralistic, proud attitudes they so hate in religious people.

[Note: Conviction of sin and grace are *cyclically* related--one leads to other to other. The greater our sense of weakness and sin the greater our realization of how extensive God's love and grace really is. But just as true, that deeper assurance of **love/grace** makes it possible to **finally** admit the greater depth of your sin. The more sure you are of not being rejected--the more honest you can afford to be with yourself! You can break into this 'cycle' at any point. In more nominally Christian societies it was good to 'break in' by trying it increase a sense of sin so grace seems precious. But today it is better to 'break in' by highlighting grace so as to make sin and the law something possible to face.]

## C. AIM AT HEART-MOTIVES UNDER (AS WELL AS) BEHAVIOR

[We saw Martin Luther believed that self-justification (rather than Lord-justification) is the root of all sin. This means that there is a particular heart-motive 'barrier' under every sin, which is some form of unbelief in the gospel of Lord-justification. This means that we must 'use the gospel' each time we do application. We must show that some form of gospel-unbelief is at the root of why we do not live as we ought. We must renew the heart-motives with the gospel, not just with exhortation that focuses directly on the will.]

### 1. Principles for Renewing the Heart with **the Gospel**.

a. The gospel offers not just forgiveness for our bad record, but also complete acceptance through Christ's perfect record. Christ did not only die in our place but lived a perfect life in our place. Therefore we do not simply get forgiveness for sins from Christ, but also complete acceptance. his perfect past and record now (in God's sight) becomes ours.

b. There is no alternative to the gospel but works-righteousness. Both religion and irreligion are forms of it. Un-religious persons are **struggling** to achieve a "**righteousness**" through their own efforts, and religious persons are **struggling** to achieve a "**righteousness**" through their own efforts. So **fundamentally**, they are no **different**.

- c. All sin is therefore ultimately rooted in 'idolatry', pseudo-salvations, false trusts or "lords" caused by works-righteousness. The ultimate reason for any sin is that something besides Christ is functioning as an alternative "righteousness" or source of confidence--and is thus an "idol", a pseudo-savior, which creates inordinate desires.
- d. All of life is repentance--not just for sins, but also for our false "righteousness(es)". Any failure of actual righteousness is always a failure to live in accordance with our imputed righteousness. We make something besides Jesus our real hope and life. So believing the gospel means to repent, not just of our sins, but of the particular (**self**) righteousness(es) underlying our behavior. That is the secret of change.
- e. Gospel repentance creates a whole new motivation in our relationship to God, to others, to ourselves, and to our life in the world. Only through the gospel is there is a new sense of delight in and service to god for the beauty of who he is in himself, not for what he gives you. That frees us to love others and do good deeds for their *own sake*, and not for how they profit us.
- f. Therefore, the gospel is not only the way to enter the kingdom. but also the way to advance (in) the kingdom.

## *2. A Basic Outline for Aiming at Heart as well as Behavior'*

The following may actually be four points in a presentation, or they may be treated very quickly as the last point of a sermon. But more generally, this is a foundational outline for the basic moral reasoning and argument that lies at the heart of the application.

- a. The Plot winds up: WHAT YOU MUST DO.  
 "This is what you have to do! Here is what the text/narrative tells us that we must do or what we must be."
- b. The Plot thickens: WHY YOU CAN'T DO IT.  
 "But you can't do it! Here are all the reasons that you will never become like this just by trying very hard."
- c. The Plot resolves: HOW HE DID IT.  
 "But there's One who did. Perfectly. Wholly. Jesus the---. He has done this for us, in our place."
- d. The Plot winds down: HOW, THROUGH HIM, YOU CAN DO IT.  
 "Our failure to do it is due to our functional rejection of what he did. Remembering him frees our heart so we can change like this..."

Discussion a) In every text of the Scripture there is somehow a moral principle. It may grow out of because of what it shows us about the character of God or Christ, or out of either the good or bad example of characters in the text, or because of explicit commands, promises, and warnings. This moral principle must be distilled clearly. b) But then a crisis is created in the hearers as the preacher shows that his moral principle creates insurmountable problems. The sermon shows how this practical and moral obligation is impossible to meet. The hearers are led to a seemingly dead end. c) Then a hidden door opens and light comes in. The sermon moves both into worship and into Christ-application when it shows how only Jesus **Christ** has fulfilled this. If the text is a narrative, you can show how Christ is the ultimate example of a particular character. If the text is didactic, you can show how Christ is the ultimate embodiment of the principle. d) Finally, we show how our inability to live as we ought stems from our rejection of Christ as the Way. Truth. and Life (or whatever the theme is). The sermon points out how to repent and rejoice in Christ in such a way that we can live as we ought.

### *Case Study #1*

If I preached a sermon on "honesty". I could show the forms of dishonesty and how harmful it is, and how we need to ask God to help us be honest. But if I stopped there (and merely called people to ask forgiveness for lying and try harder to be honest). I would only be playing to the heart's natural self-righteousness. I would be essentially supporting the growth of 'common

morality' in the people. Those who would be convicted by the sermon would feel guilty and burdened. Those who had not lied lately would be smug. I should admit that nearly every sermon I ever preached on honesty/lying up in my first 15 years in the ministry was like this! Even though I knew (via Ed Clowney) that I had to preach Christ and not moralism from every text, I really just made Jesus an 'add-on'. I didn't apply him as Savior to the actual sin of lying, but to the aftermath only. My sermon would go like this:

- I. Here are all the ways we lie, and why they are forbidden.
- II. We should not lie, because Jesus told the truth and kept his promises.  
(Jesus as Example)
- III. If we do lie, Jesus will forgive us and help us do better.  
(Jesus as God-of-gaps)

In other words. I used Jesus as an example, and then as someone who forgives us when, though we try very hard, we sometimes fail. This essentially tells people to sanctify themselves. It implicitly appeals to fear and/or pride as motives for honesty.

But in gospel analysis we ask the question: "why do you lie in a particular situation?" The usual reason we lie is because there is something we feel that we simply must have (besides Jesus) to survive and be truly happy, and so we lie. It is usually a good reputation, or saving face, or approval, or some other thing. I first came to understand this when I realized that my wife and I tend to 'fudge' the truth in very different circumstances. I realized that the underlying reason that I lied/deceived was a fear of people's disapproval.

Using "Luther-ist" analysis, I was trusting in the approval of people rather than in Christ as my functional trust, as my main hope. But anything you add to Jesus Christ as a requirement for a happy life is a functional salvation, a pseudo-lord, and it is controlling you, whether it be power, approval, comfort or control. So the only way to change your habit of lying is to (not just try harder) but to apply the gospel--to repent of your failure to believe the gospel, and see that you are not saved by pursuing this thing (which you are lying to get), but through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Alternatives What are the alternatives? *Type #1*- On the one hand, there is a 'Christ as Example' or 'moralistic' sermon that says--"please try harder or God will be very unhappy!". *Type #2*- On the other hand, there is a 'Christ as God-of-Gaps' or 'relativistic' sermon that says--"we all fall down but God loves us anyway!" (Many people today in **the** Reformed camp smell that 'church growth' theory has led us to more 'relativistic' sermons in the evangelical world. But are we just to go back to the moralistic ones?)

Instead we must do 'Christ-as-Savior' or 'gospel' sermons. Unlike *Type #2* sermons, they begin with deep, below the surface repentance. not a **superficial** application of "**Jesus** loves you anyway". Unlike "*Type #1*" sermons, they end with rejoicing, since the thing we must repent of is always a failure to enjoy, delight in, and relish the grace and provision of Christ's work. So this is how I learned to preach **sermons** on lying--or on anything else. No matter what the issue, if we call people to '**try** harder', we actually push them deeper into slavery, but when we always solve the problem by applying the gospel, then both a) non-Christians get to hear it every week in multiple perspectives, and b) Christians get to see how it really works in the every aspect of life.

Sum: Only "Christo-centric" preaching can really lead the hearers to true virtue, gospel holiness. Typical preaching only distills 'Biblical principles' which do not see the text in its redemptive-historical context. Thus it is only natural that the application part of such a sermon will tend to merely exhort people to conform to the principles. **Only** Christo-centric preaching can produce gospel holiness.


## Case Study #2

A Sermon on Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac.

1. We must put God first in every area of life, like Abraham did. (This is where the traditional sermon ends!!)
  2. But we can't! We won't! So we should be condemned.
  3. But Jesus put God **first**, on the **cross**-- His was the ultimate and perfect act of submission to God. Jesus is the only one that God ever said--"Obey me and as a result I will send you to hell." Jesus obeyed anyway--just for truth's sake, for God's sake. The only perfect act of submission.
  4. Only when we see that Jesus obeyed **like** Abraham for us! Can we begin to live like Abraham. Let your heart think like this--
- Only when I see God's already accepted me can I even begin to try to live like Abraham. I'd never even start down this road--of Abraham-like obedience. Otherwise I'd not even keep it up. I'd be so discouraged by my failures. But God has already set his love on me, prior to my obedience. Without knowing that. I'd never have the heart to start or keep going.
  - Only when I see God's already accepted me can I deal with the real reasons I fail to live like Abraham. I put "Isaacs" ahead of Christ because I think they will give me more security and worth than he will. Only by joying in my acceptance will these Isaacs lose their power over me. Without doing that, I'd not have the ability to make any progress **at all**.
  - Only when I see God's accepted me can I really want to live like Abraham for the right, non-destructive reason. As I sit and listen to this sermon about Abraham. I realize I may **try** to obey God so that he will give me a happy life and family. But if I obey like that, I'm really not obeying him for his sake. I'm using the Law of God to control him. not praise him. Without joying in. seeing, resting in Christ's obedience for **me**, I'll never be obeying for the right reason, nor even truly obeying at all.

## Case Study #3

A ~~Sermon~~ on the power of **sexual/beauty's** attraction in our culture.

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- I. What you must do: The power of **physical beauty** over us must be broken. **Look** at the devastation in our society and in our lives. 1) It distorts women's view of themselves (add eating disorders) 2) it demoralizes aging people, 3) it distorts men's lives, by making them reject great spouse-prospects for superficial reasons (add pornography). What must we do? Don't judge a book by its cover. Be deep. Don't be controlled.
  - II. But you can't: You know quite well we won't be able to. **Why?** 1) First, we desire physical beauty to cover our own sense of shame and inadequacy. Genesis 3. 'When you look good you feel good about yourself' really equals "...you feel yourself to be good." 2) Second, we are afraid of our mortality and death. Evolutionary biologists and Christians together agree that the drive to have physical beauty is a desire for youth. We'll never overcome our problem by just 'trying'.
  - III. But there was one who did. There was one who was beautiful beyond bearing yet willingly gave it up (Phil.2). He became ugly that we **might** become beautiful (Is.53).
  - IV. Only now we can change. Only as we see what he did for us **will** our hearts be melted and freed from the belief that we can judge a book by its cover. Only when we can be **in him** will we be freed from our sense of shame and fear of mortality.

Note: See Appendix A to this Chapter- 'Preaching and Idols'

## D. LOOK AT THE TEXT THROUGH THREE 'APPLICATION PERSPECTIVES'

### 1. What the 'Three Perspectives' are.

Vern Poythress in his new God-centered Interpretation takes John Frame's 3-perspectives of normative (prophetic).existential (priestly),and situational (kingly) **and** works this out for



hermeneutics. He says that when interpreting the text, you do not know meaning of text unless you understand its author's original historic sense (normative), its application to hearers (existential), and its place in the history of redemption (situational). If you only use one of these three aspects, you make it an idol and it leads to distortions.

However, once you 'go into' the application to the hearers, you again have the three perspectives. Again, if you only use one of the aspects, you make it an idol and it leads to distortions. He calls these distortions--the 'Doctrinalist' (mainly normative); 'Pietist' (mainly existential), and 'Cultural-transformationalist' (mainly kingly).

a. A 'Doctrinalist' looks to a text to see how it supports sound doctrine. This person makes the Enlightenment mistake that you can have objective knowledge without it being personal. The Reformed way to put this is that all knowledge is 'covenantal'. (See M.Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority and Frame, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*) Their basic gist is this: no part of revelation is given simply to be *known*. Everything that is revealed is revealed for covenant service (Deut.29:29) There is no neutrality--you are either in covenant service to God as you look at world or in covenant service to some other Lord. Thus Frame in 'God in our Studies' in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp.81-84 is able to say that the way the Lord has structured knowledge so that you can only understand God's truth-if you know *yourself*, and your world, as well as the Biblical text. The three perspectives 'co-inhere'. You can't really know what a Biblical text means unless you also know how it is to affect the world and you. In short, if I don't know how to *use* a text, I don't know it's meaning--so the difference between 'meaning' and 'application' is meaningless.

Many evangelicals, especially in the Reformed camps are afraid of subjectivism and of being 'man-centered'. They want to simply "expound what the divine Biblical text says, without regard to 'felt needs' or human concerns." But that is impossible. The minute the doctrinalist starts reading a text, he is doing so with particular questions on his heart--the last Presbytery debate he was at, the last books he read, a particular cultural problem--and thus the reader finds in the Scripture the answers to the questions on his heart. If the Bible is covenantal revelation--if, in fact, if all knowledge is covenantal--done in moral commitment to some 'lord' so that no such thing as neutral, value-free 'fact'--then application to felt needs is *happening* in every interpretation and preaching. So you better do it consciously, to the people in front of you, or you will only be pleasing your self or even solving your own problems in the pulpit, and starving everyone else.

b. A Pietist tends to look at every text as it relates to people psychologically and devotionally. . The text is applied to answer the questions: how does this help us relate to the Lord? How does it help our prayer life. How does it show us how to live in the world? How does this help the non-believer find Christ? How does this help me handle my personal problems? The pietist is the best of the three at looking for ways to preach a text evangeiistically and bring it to bear on the individual's heart and conscience in order to get a 'decision'. Also, the pietist is constantly aware of how Christians are lose their internal spiritual grip on the doctrine of free justification and may be 'returning to the bondage' (Gal.5:1) to false savior-gods (Gal.4:8).

c. A Cultural-transformationist tends to look at the text as it relates to corporate and cultural issues, such as social justice and economic fairness and Christian community building. The 'Great Reversal' of the cross means that the gospel proclaims a complete reversal of the values of the world--power, recognition, status, wealth. For example, the gospel is especially welcomed by the poor and for the poor (Luke 4:18- He *has anointed me...to preach the gospel to the poor.*" Cf. also Luke 7:22.) Preaching the gospel and healing people's bodies are closely associated (Luke 9:6). Jesus points to the coming kingdom of God that will renew all of creation. The gospel creates a people with a whole alternate way of being human. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition--all these things are marks of living in the world, and are the opposite of the

mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26). The cultural-transformationist looks at all things with this perspective.

So the doctrinalist reads Luke 4:31-37 and says: "This passage teaches the deity of Christ and demonstrates his sovereignty over evil spirits and also shows the grace of God toward people in bondage to sin." The pietist looks at the same passage and says: "this passage teaches that Jesus can solve my problems if I let him and also that once I am delivered I have to tell my friends." The cultural-transformationist reads the passage and says: "this passage shows Christ as an active power in the world, transforming the world, liberating people from oppressive structures." (See Poythress, pp.1-4)

We need all three perspectives when thinking about and writing application. Orthodox people are sensitive to 'therapeutic' and 'liberationist' idolatries. But they tend to cling to old Enlightenment idolatries themselves into a 'doctrinalist' idolatry. Since by temperament, we **all** have our 'bent', we should force ourselves to look at a text through all three application 'perspectives'. When we do so, we will often see many rich possible uses of a text that otherwise we would miss.

## 2. *The Three Perspectives and the question of What is the Gospel?*

a. The Discussion. There is a rather **significant** and growing controversy going on about 'what is the gospel?' in evangelical circles today. Many people are saying that the traditional evangelical gospel is too 'individualistic' because it left out the 'kingdom of God'. More and more are saying, "the gospel is the good news of the reign of God, not the good news that you can have personal forgiveness and peace with God." (Much of this sort of language is inspired by the writings of Lesslie Newbigin, N.T.Wright, and the 'Gospel and Our Culture Network'.)

This kind of talk is both helpful and misleading. It is quite true that traditional evangelicalism has been individualistic, largely because of a lack of orientation to the Redemptive-Historical perspective. It is quite true that 'the kingdom' is essential to the gospel. For example, the very concept of *simul justus et peccator*--simultaneously legally 'just' and yet actually 'sinful', the very heart of Luther's gospel--is based on the 'already but not yet' of the kingdom of God. Justification by faith is possible because of the presence now of the future verdict upon God's people on judgment day. When we are 'born again', we are born into **the kingdom** (John 3:1ff). So if you leave the kingdom of God out of the gospel preaching, you are being misleading. However, it may also be quite misleading for a preacher to simply say, "the good news is that the reign of God is here!" That can become a new moralism (asocially activist moralism) that tells people "God's program of creation renewal is going on, and you can join it." But how does a person join it? By just 'getting with the program' in some general way? By getting baptized and beginning to live according to kingdom values? This may end up being a new kind of **self-effort**. I doubt that preaching simply "the good news is the reign of God" is going to lead people to respond. "My chains fell off; my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee."

b. Three Perspectives on the Gospel. I think it is important to see that the gospel itself (just like the Tri-une God) should be understood through three perspectives as well. Each perspective is true in that it eventually comprises the whole, but each approach begins with a particular 'door' or aspect.

The 'normative' aspect I'll call "the gospel of Christ" - stresses objective, historic work of Christ that Jesus really came in time-space and history to accomplish **all** for us. It will **talk** much more about the real, historicity of Jesus life, death and resurrection. John Stott. This view thinks that the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians was a doctrinal heresy.

The 'existential' aspect I'll call "the gospel of **sonship**"- stresses our new identity in Christ as adopted children, liberated from the law. It will **talk** much of the power of the spirit to renew broken hearts and psyches. Jack Miller. This view thinks that the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians was a pastoral one of Christians falling back into legalism.

The 'situational' aspect I'll call "the gospel of the kingdom" - stresses the reversal of values in the new creation. It will talk about healed community, cultural transformation, ministry of deed and justice. Harvie Conn. This view thinks that the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians was the lack of 'table fellowship' between Jew and Gentile.

We need all three perspectives, though each perspective is not simply a 'part' of the gospel. For example, the 'kingdom' perspective contains the other two. If God is king, then salvation must be by grace, for if we are saved by works, something else will be our Lord and Savior. Or, if we have a new identity in Christ by sheer grace, then we must not look down at anyone else, and self-justification is the basis of racism and injustice. If you go deep enough into any one perspective, you will find the other two.

c. What is 'the Problem'? There is a great danger of getting locked into only one perspective because we get obsessed with some too-sweeping analysis of what **the** main problem "in our world today". (1) If you think that subjectivism in society is the problem you will do the gospel of X and fear that sonship-gospel and the **kingdom-gospel** sound too much like the 'liberal' ideas. (2) If you think that Pharisaical objectivism is the problem, you will do the **sonship-gospel** with more emphasis on personal individual emotional freedom. (3) If you think the main problem we face is old Enlightenment individualism, you will do the gospel of the kingdom with more emphasis on **working together sacrificially** to transform power of the gospel. But aren't we facing all these problems?

Remember also that different groups and classes of people are in different conditions. With traditional cultures, the traditional evangelical gospel good, as it builds on a desire for historical evidence and a sense of 'truth'. Traditional cultures (with their share of 'failed Pharisees') often respond well to the sonship-gospel, as may 'post-modern' people who have a desire for freedom. Many groups with a high 'people-consciousness' such as minorities will respond better to the kingdom-gospel, as will many post-modern people who think more so in terms of 'sociology' than psychology (identity politics).

So we should be careful. Most of us are 'in reaction' to some approach to the gospel we think unbalanced. We must not over-react by getting 'stuck' in one perspective.

### **3. Case Study: Application for the Story of Esther**

"WHAT YOU MUST DO"

a. God calls us to serve him in intensely secular settings. (Cultural Transformationist) This message is similar (but stronger!) as that of the accounts of Joseph and Daniel. We learn here how a believer can be effectively used by God in the heart of secular and pluralistic culture, even in the centers of its power. In all three accounts, we learn of Jewish figures who rise to power in an unbelieving society through their skills and talents--and then use their places to save their people.

This is a threatening message to many Christians today. There has **always** been a strong tendency among orthodox believers toward separation from the polluted, unclean, and **morally/spiritually** 'messy' arenas of politics, business, **government**, and so on. But Esther is a concubine, a member of a harem!

Let Esther's harem represent every unclean political or commercial institution or structure where evil reigns and must be confronted. Believers are needed there....**Our** cities are full of dens of iniquity. Our culture is described as essentially post-Christian, secular, and often antithetical to biblical values and hostile to biblical virtues...[But] Esther gives us **permission** to reflect on our call to serve God within the matrix of a modern secular...system....How could God call Esther to be the interracial replacement spouse of a **polygamous**, pagan Persian king?....This book is off the screen for many evangelicals....We urban people need Esther now

more than ever. Never allow it to be trivialized or spiritualized away, as it has been so often....” (Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (IVP, 1997).

b. God calls us not only to change individuals, but change society and culture. (Cultural Transformationist) In each case we've looked at in this course--Joseph, Daniel, and Esther--God called someone to work for just laws and policies in a secular society. It is common for modern Christians to insist that the only way to change society is to convert and disciple individuals. If that is all there is to be done, then the 'higher' calling would be to go into Christian ministry. But the Bible shows us people who God also calls to work for social and "systemic" justice and peace in society. Esther used her position to have an unjust law repealed.

Ray Bakke (*A Theology as Big as the City*, p.106) reminds us that we must read Esther 'synoptically' with Ezra and Nehemiah. These three Jewish 'heroes' had three very different callings. Ezra was a clergyman, who taught the Bible to the restored community in Jerusalem. Nehemiah was a lay person who used his skills to literally rebuild the wall and infra-structure of Jerusalem to insure safe streets and a decent economy. Esther, meanwhile, used her position to work for just laws in the secular realm. Only all three people, working together, were able to rebuild Jerusalem into a viable city. One did evangelism/discipleship (working on the spiritual welfare), one did community development (working on the social and economic welfare), and one did social justice (creating laws that were just and allowed the community to grow). This was not only a lay-clergy leadership team, but a male-female leadership team.

This means that we will never see God's kingdom move forward with only evangelism and discipleship. We must also do 'wholistic' ministry that works on behalf of the poor and at-risk neighborhoods, and we must also have Christians in 'secular' jobs working with excellence, integrity, and distinctiveness. We need Ezra ministry, Nehemiah ministry, and Esther ministry--all together--if we are going to 'win' our society for Christ.

c. God is the only real King. (Doctrinalist)

We have noted that God's name is never directly mentioned why? The teaching is: God is sovereignly in control, even when he appears to be completely absent. The dramatic tension in the book revolves around a threat to the very existence of the Jews. If we put the book in its total Biblical context, we know that this is really a threat to the whole plan of God to redeem the world by grace. Genesis 12:1-3 tells us that God planned to bring salvation into the world through a family and a people, descended from Abraham. Abraham's people were to be guardians of both the true faith and the "Messianic seed" which would one day produce a savior who would redeem the world. A threat to the Jewish nation was, therefore, an attack by the world on God's redemptive plan. However, largely through a set of "coincidences", the Jews are saved. God's plan to save the world through grace is intact.

"What the writer of Esther has done is to give us a story in which the main actor is not so much as mentioned--the presence of God is implied and understood throughout the story, so that these mounting coincidences are but the by-product of his rule over history and his providential care for his people. It is an extraordinary piece of literary genius that this author wrote a book that is about the actions and rule of God from **beginning** to end, and yet that God is not named on a single page of the story." (Dillard, p.196).

What a vivid way to teach us that God is always present, even when he seems most absent and his purposes most 'opaque'! The message of the book is that God's plan of **grace/salvation** cannot fail, and though he may appear to be completely absent, he is really behind everything, working out his plan.

Because of this theme, the writer contrasts two conflicting world-views--that of **Haman** and that of **Mordecai**. **Haman** believes in chance-fate. He casts lots to determine the best time to

annihilate the Jews (3:7-11). He thinks he can control history by the exercise of his power. The other world-view is that of Mordecai. He believes that there is a divine presence over-ruling history (4:14) who can use us if we make ourselves available to him, but whose plan is not dependent on nor thwarted by human power. "The book sets the two world-views in contrast and shows by the outcome which is to be preferred." (Baldwin, p.38)

Nevertheless, we are taught that God's sovereignty is not determinism. When the story is over, it will be possible to look back and see that so much of what happened was due to a divine power behind even the most mundane 'accidents'. Yet the narrator does not depict a kind of fatalistic determinism. Our choices are not determined apart from the responsible exercise of our will. Esther will have to risk her life and act courageously if the salvation of her people **will** be realized. We are not just passive pawns in God's plan.

d. Human strength is weakness and weakness can be strength. (Pietist)

Recent commentators have noticed the weakness of men and the power of women in the book. In contrast to the huge show of power in his great feast, the drunken Xerxes tries to **humiliate** his wife who in turn humiliates him. In response, he decrees that all men should control their wives when he can't control his own. The decree, evidently made when he was still drunk, only makes him look foolish. Later he appears to regret it on several fronts.

Not only is he 'bested' by his first queen, the rest of the book shows him being 'bested' by his next queen. While the **king** is revealed to be ill-informed, forgetful, impulsive, unjust, and unwise, his queen Esther is seen to be brave, take-charge, focused, wise, and just. Not only Vashti and Esther, but **Haman's** wife **Zareh** appear as 'strong **and** shrewd' while all the men (except Mordecai) appear vain and foolish.

Esther, of course, is the person who most of all stands the world's expectations on their head. First, she was an orphan, without father or mother (2:7). Orphans are one of the oppressed, powerless groups (cf. James 1:27). Second, she was a woman, and not a powerful or wealthy woman, but a concubine, the member of a harem. In the process of the narrative, however, she ascends from being an orphan and Mordecai's protegee to being a queen of great power, who makes plans and takes decisive leadership and who in the end is her uncle's guardian. Originally, her physical beauty won the king's heart, but 2:15 indicates that her character and behavior had won the attraction of the rest of the court as well. Esther comes from the outside margins of society and is used by God to do redemption. So again we see a very prominent theme in the Bible. God does not work through the channels that the world considers strong and powerful. Instead, he works through groups (women, racial **minorities**) who seem powerless. The first shall be last **and** the last shall be first.

In a related theme, we **learn** that 'the one who would lose himself **will find** himself. We learn that evil sets up strains in the fabric of life and backfires on the perpetrator, while faithfulness to God is also wise. **Haman**, who intends to destroy Mordecai and his **kin**, ultimately destroys only himself and his **kin**. This theme is especially achieved through the literary device of irony. The gallows that **Haman** builds for Mordecai becomes his own place of execution. **Haman** seeks to plunder the wealth of the Jews, but it is **his** wealth that fall into their hands. The reversal of role and of fortune that occurs so often in the Bible eventually **finds** its fullest expression in Jesus, who was exalted because he stooped so low. At the same time Satan is brought low because he sought exaltation. Sum--Do what you can to penetrate the culture. Don't live in a ghetto!--and when there, sever the Lord. Serve your people. Serve the interest of justice! Don't be afraid to lose your power, even your life, for God is the real **king!** Don't be seduced by human power, beauty, and acclaim!

"WHY YOU CAN'T DO IT"

Now how can you do all? You can't! If we end the sermon right here, we'll all be in despair. You don't have the courage to do this. You may get excited today about doing this, but your courage

will evaporate quickly. And you may decide you are going to make all the risks that Esther made, but when it comes down to it, you aren't going to risk your influence and money and status to help people in needs. You just won't have the ability to do so.

#### "BUT THERE IS ONE WHO DID DO THIS"

You have to often go into the palace--but not be tempted by the palace! You've got to be willing to leave the palace in order to serve your Lord! (**Ah**, but why can't we? We are enthralled to acclaim and glory of the palace! How free ourselves? Esther's great temptation, once she comes into a place of luxury, comfort, and privilege, is to hold on to that position to the detriment of her people. When by God's grace we come into such a standing, we may be seduced by it. Mordecai had to challenge Esther and force her to see her choices. Salvation comes through Esther only when she is willing to give up her place in the palace and take her life into her **own** hands and risk it all in order to intercede before the throne of power. **Again** we see that redemption comes not by gaining but by losing, not by **filling** oneself. but by emptying oneself.

We also see, over and over, that we need a deliverer who identifies with us and that stands as our representative--as in the career of Joseph in Egypt, David before Goliath. So in this story we are led to see Jesus, who did not need a challenge to leave his place of power, who saved us not at the risk of his glory but at the cost of his glory, who did not say, "if I perish, I perish" but "when I perish, I perish", who had to die in order to stand before the throne as our intercessor (Heb.7:24-25). But the "rest" that Jesus brings is not one that gives us rest from enemies by lulling them, but by winning them. After the cross, we pray for our enemies. Jesus has brought the barrier down between Jew and Gentile, Saul and Amalek. We *learn--* **Salvation** 'rest' comes by the *sacrifice and* intercession *of* another. We have one who was in the greatest palace of **all**, but who did not just serve his God as the risk of losing the palace, but at the cost

## E. DISCIPLINE WHO YOU TALK TO.

### 1. *Your peoplecontext always shapes your sermons.*

When we study the Bible, we only extract answers to the questions that we implicitly or explicitly have on our hearts as we read it. If **all** revelation is covenantal, and we don't understand a passage of the Scripture unless we know how to "use" it (see Session 1-B), then there is no such thing as a 'view from nowhere'. We have certain questions, problems, and issues on our mind, and as we read the Bible, we mainly "hear" what it teaches us about those questions, problems, and issues.

Therefore, there is a "vicious" cycle in preaching. You will tend to preach to the people you listen to most during the week. Why? The people you are most engaged with **fill** your mind with their questions, which act as something of a 'grid' as you read the Bible. Their issues will on your mind as you read and you will especially notice Biblical truth that speaks to them. Thus your **sermons** will tend to aim at the people who you are already have most on your heart. They will then be the people that are most interested and satisfied by your preaching. They **will** come and bring others like themselves. Because they are coming, you will meet more of them, speak more to them, and thus (semi-consciously) tailor your sermons more to them. The more you listen to them. the more they pull the sermon toward them--the more you direct the sermon to them. the more they come to church--the more they come to church, the more you listen to them.

At the very worst. evangelical preachers read and engage other evangelical preachers and writers. They read (and speak to) almost exclusively those thinkers that support their own views. Then the sermons are really only helpful for other **seminary** students and graduates (of your particular stripe!) It is not really true that some sermons are too academic and thus lack application. Rather, the preacher is applying the text to the people's questions that he most understands--other academics.

At the best, evangelical preachers read and engage other evangelical Christians. Then their sermons are really only helpful for other Christians. Christians may love the messages and feel they are being "fed", but they know instinctively that they cannot bring non-Christian friends to church. They never think, "I wish my non-Christian neighbor could be here to hear this."

There is then no abstract, academic way to preach relevant, applicatory sermons. They will arise from who will listen to. If you spend most of your time reading, instead of out with people, you will apply the Bible text to the authors of the books you read. If you spend most of your time in Christian meetings or in the evangelical sub-culture, your **sermons** will apply the Bible text to the needs of evangelicals. The only way out of this is to deliberately diversify your people context.

## *2. Deliberately diversify your people-context.*

How? The first approach is easiest--vary what you read. Read lots of material by people who differ wildly from you theologically. The fastest way to do this is not to read books, but magazines. For happily middle class liberal/New Age culture, read *The Utne Reader*. For angry liberal/atheistic culture, read *The Nation*. For sophisticated, upscale liberal culture read *The New Yorker*. For cutting edge GenX liberal culture, try Wired. There are quite a few other periodicals that would do just as well. This is just an idea.

The second approach is harder--vary who to talk to. Pastors find this difficult, because most people won't be themselves with us. Nevertheless, through being very careful with your appointment schedule, and through being creative with your community and neighborhood involvement, be sure to spend time with people from a variety of spiritual conditions. Here is a partial list. Be sure that you do not find you only spend time with one kind of person.

## F. DISCIPLINE WHO YOU 'PICTURE'.

Now when you both read the Bible text and write the sermon, think especially of individuals you know with various spiritual conditions (non-Christian, weak Christian, strong Christian), with various besetting sins (pride, lust, worry, greed, prejudice, resentment, self-consciousness, depression, fear, guilt), and in various circumstances (loneliness, persecution, weariness, grief, sickness, failure, indecision, confusion, physical handicaps, old age, disillusionment, boredom). Now, remembering specific faces, look at the Biblical truth you are applying and ask: "how would this text apply to this or that person?" Imagine yourself personally counseling the person with the text. Write down what you would say. The effect of this exercise is to be sure that your application is specific, **practical**, and **personal**.

### *1. Quick-Lists.*

At the very least, ask yourself: 'What does this text say to a) Mature Christians, b) non-Christians, c) newer or very immature Christians?'

A second list to keep in your head easily is to ask yourself: 'What does this text say to the 'four soils', the four groups of the Mark 4 parable?' a) Conscious skeptics and rejecters of the faith, b) Nominal Christians whose commitment is extremely shallow, c) Christians who are divided in their loyalties and messed up in their priorities, d) Mature, committed Christians.

### *2. Warning Will Robinson!*

Important safety tip. If the **person(s)** you are visualizing are actually going to be in the audience which hears the sermon you are preparing, be sure not to use details that would make it appear that you are using the pulpit to publicly rebuke an individual. That is an **unBiblical** thing to do! (Matthew 18 and 5 tell us to go to a person privately if we have something against them.) You want your sermon to apply to large numbers of people, not just one. Use the

thought of individuals to stimulate specific applications, but don't write them out in such a way to cause the audience to play a "guessing game" about the parties you are referring to.

### 3. Longer Lists (to get you thinking)

Here are the kind of different people you may be speaking to. Does the text speak to any of them?

#### *Non-Christians*

- Conscious Unbeliever -Aware he is not a Christian.
  - Immoral pagan -Living a blatantly **immoral/illegal** lifestyle.
  - Intellectual pagan -Claiming the faith is untenable or unreasonable.
    - Imitative pagan -**Is** fashionably skeptical. but not profound.
    - Genuine thinker -Has serious, well-conceived objections.
  - Religious Non-Christian -Belonging to organized religions, cults. or denominations with seriously mistaken doctrine.
- Non-churched Nominal Christian -Has belief in basic Christian doctrines, but with no or remote church connection.
- a Churched Nominal Christian -Participates in church but is not regenerated.
  - a Semi-active moralist -Respectably moral whose religion is without assurance and is all a matter of duty.
  - Active self-righteous -Very committed and involved in the church, with assurance of salvation based on good works.
- Awakened Sinner -Stirred and convicted over his sin but without gospel peace yet.
  - Curious -Stirred up mainly in an intellectual way, full of questions and diligent in study.
  - Convicted with false peace -Without understanding the gospel. has been told that by - walking an aisle. praying a prayer, or doing something, he is now right with God.
  - Comfortless -Extremely aware of sins but not accepting or understanding the gospel of grace.
- Apostate -Once active in the church but who has repudiated the faith without regrets.

#### *Christians*

- New Believer -Recently converted.
  - Doubtful -Has many fears and hesitations about his new faith.
  - Eager -Beginning with joy and confidence and a zeal to learn and serve.
  - Overzealous -Has become somewhat proud and judgmental of others. and is overconfident of his own abilities.
- Mature/growing -Passes through nearly all of the basic conditions named below, but progresses through them because he responds quickly to pastoral treatment or he knows how to treat himself.
- Afflicted -Lives under a burden or trouble that saps spiritual strength. (Generally, we call a person afflicted who has not brought the trouble on himself.)
  - Physically afflicted -Experiencing bodily decay
    - the sick
    - the elderly
    - the disabled
  - Dying



- Bereaved -Has lost a loved one or experienced some other major loss (a home through a fire, etc.)
  - Lonely
  - Persecuted/Abused
  - Poor/economic troubles
  - Desertion -Spiritually dry through the action of God who removes a sense of his nearness despite the use of the means of grace.
- Tempted -Struggling with a sin or sins which are remaining attractive and strong.
    - Overtaken -Tempted largely in the realm of the thoughts and desires.
    - Taken over -A sin has become addictive behavior.
- Immature -A spiritual baby, who should be growing, but who is not.
    - Undisciplined -Simply lazy in using the means of grace and in using gifts for ministry
    - Self-satisfied -Pride has choked growth. complacency and he has become perhaps cynical and scornful of many other Christians.
    - Unbalanced -Has had either the intellectual, the emotional, or the volitional aspect of his faith become overemphasized.
    - Devotees of eccentric doctrines -Has become absorbed in a distorted teaching that hurts spiritual growth.
- Depressed -is not only experiencing negative feelings, but is also shirking Christian duties and being disobedient. (Note: If a person is a new believer, or tempted, or afflicted, or immature, and does not get proper treatment, he will become **spiritually** depressed. Besides these conditions, the following problems can lead to depression.)
    - Anxious -Through worry or fear handled improperly is depressed.
    - Weary -Has become listless and dry through overwork.
    - Angry -Through bitterness or uncontrolled anger handled improperly is depressed.
    - Introspective -Dwells on failures and feelings and lacks assurance.
    - Guilty -A conscience which is wounded and repentance has not been reached.
  - Backslidden -Has gone beyond depression to a withdrawal from fellowship with God and with the church.
    - Tender -Is still easily convicted of his sins, and susceptible to calls for repentance.
    - Hardening -Has become cynical, scornful, and difficult to convict.

## G. WEAVE APPLICATION THROUGHOUT THE SERMON.

### 1. Use both "running" and "collected" application.

Application is not appended to the end of a sermon--it runs throughout. Nevertheless, a sermon as it progresses, should move to more and more direct and specific application. "Running application" refers to the fact that the every Biblical principle must be stated immediately in its "practical bearings". But as the **sermon** winds to a close, it is important for the preacher to "collect" the applications, recap them, and then drive it home by moving at least one step deeper in **specificness**.

### 2. Ask direct questions.

The best preachers speak to each listener very personally. That can be done by posing **direct questions** to the audience, posing inquiries which call for a response in the heart. Ask, "how many of you **know** that this past week you twisted the **truth** or omitted part of the truth in order to look good?" and follow it with a pause. This is far more personal and attention-riveting than a mere statement. "many people twist the truth or tell half-truths to reach their own

ends." Talk to the people; ask direct questions. Be ready for the occasional person who really will answer you back! But the goal is to have the people answer in their minds/hearts--carrying on a dialogue with you.

### *3. Anticipate objections and questions.*

If you know the people to whom you speak, you will know the **kind** of objections or questions they will be posing in their hearts in response to your points. So identify those questions and express them. This keeps up the personal dialogue and lends great power to the sermon. For example:

"Now some of you are likely saying, 'Yes, that's great for you, but you have faith. I wish I could believe in God, I have tried, but I just can't develop the faith!' But friend, your real problem is not that you can't believe in God, but that you are refusing to doubt yourself. You are committed to the "doctrine" of your own competence to run your life. And you believe in it against **all** the evidence! Come! Admit what you know down deep. that you are not wise and able enough to run your own life. Doubt yourself, and you will begin to move toward faith in God."

Look at the Puritans for models of this. They were excellent at posing "common objections" and answering them within the body of the sermon.

### *4. Provide tests for self-examination.*

Do not underestimate the sinner's ability to avoid conviction of sin! Every heart has scores of time-tested subterfuges and excuses by which it can somehow rationalize away any direct confrontation with its own wickedness. As you preach, these are the kinds of thoughts going on in the minds of the listeners:

'Well. that's easy to say--you don't have my husband!'  
"I suppose that may be true of others, but not of me."  
"I sure wish Sally was here to hear this--she really needs that."

Therefore, it is important to provide brief "tests" for the listeners. For example:

'Well. perhaps you agree with me--you agree that pride is bad and humility is good, but you think 'but I don't have much of a problem with pride.' Well look at yourself. Are you too shy to witness? Are you too self-conscious to tell people the truth? What is that. but a kind of pride, a fear of looking bad?"

The "tests" of course, are simply "example illustrations", of the sort that John the Baptist gave his audience in Luke 3.

### *5. Don't pass by the "pliable" moment.*

Often there come points in the sermon when it is evident that the audience's attention is riveted and they are getting something of what Adams calls an "experience" of the truth. Often you can sense that people are coming under conviction. One sign is usually the lack of fidgeting, foot shuffling, and throat clearing. The audience gets more silent and still.

This is a "pliable" or a teachable moment. Don't let it go past! Don't be so tied to your outline or notes that you fail to take time to drive home the truth directly and specifically. Perhaps you could pause, and look the people in the eye as they swallow the food you have just fed them.

### *6. Be affectionate as well as forceful.*

Be sure, when you deal very specifically with the behavior and thoughts of people, that you combine an evident love for them with your straight talk about sin. Be both warm and forceful when dealing with personal questions--never ridiculing! If you ridicule a listener for a question he or she has just posed (perhaps) in the heart, you will make yourself appear haughty and unapproachable (and maybe you are!)

### 7. *Use a balance of the many forms of application.*

Application includes, at least, a) warning and admonishing, b) encouraging and renewing, c) comforting and soothing, d) urging, pleading, and "stirring up". There is a dangerous tendency for a preacher to specialize in just one of these. Often this comes because of a bent in the temperament or personality. That is, some preachers are temperamentally gentle and reserved, others are light-hearted and optimistic, while others are serious and intense. These temperaments can distort our application of the Biblical truth so that we are **always** majoring in one kind. But over the long haul, that weakens our persuasiveness. People get used to same tone or tenor of voice. It is far more effective when a speaker can move from sweetness and sunshine to clouds and thunder! Let the Biblical text control you, not your temperament. "Loud" truth should be communicated as loud, "hard" truth should be communicated as hard. "sweet" truth should be communicated sweetly.

## Appendix A -

# Preaching and Pastoring on Idols

### INTRODUCTION

'Idolatry' is a major theme for 'what ails' us. It is there all through the Bible as a or the unifying way to describe what is wrong with us--psychologically, intellectually, sociologically, culturally. But again, it the word itself is fairly rare in the NT, but once we get a bead on some key texts and some key words, we will see how pervasive concept is. And if it is **the** main way to understand what is wrong with us--a pastor, a physician of souls, can't possibly ignore it.

### A. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY - OLD TESTAMENT

The whole story of the Bible--at least in the OT, can be seen as a struggle between true faith and idolatry.

#### 1. *In the beginning--idolatry*

In the beginning, human beings were made to 1) worship and serve God, and then 2) to rule over all created things in God's name (Gen.1:26-28). Instead, we "fell into sin". But when Paul sums up the 'fall' of humanity into sin, he does so by describing it in terms of idolatry. He says we refused to give God glory (i.e. to make him the most important thing) and instead chose certain parts of creation to glorify in his stead. ***"They exchanged the glory of the immortal God...and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator."*** (Rom.1:21-25) In short, we reversed the original intended order. Human beings came to 1) worship and serve created things, and therefore 2) the created things came to rule over them. Death itself is the ultimate emblem of this, since we toil in the dust until finally the dust rules us (Gen.3:17-19).

#### 2. *The Law-- against Idols*

The great sin of the Mosaic period is the making of a golden calf (Exod.32). The 10 commandments' first two and most basic laws (one-fifth of **all** God's law to humankind) against idolatry. 1st command is prohibition against worshipping other gods; the 2nd command is a prohibition against worshipping God idolatrously, as we want **him** to be. And after God's entire code of covenant behavior is given in Exodus 20-23, it ended with a summary warning not to make 'a covenant with...their gods" (v.32) lest they 'snare you" (v.33). So "idolatry" sums up **all** that God's law is against. Just like Romans 1, Exodus does not envision any 'third' option. We will either worship the **uncreated** God, or we will worship some created thing (an idol). There is no possibility of our worshipping nothing. We will "**worship and serve**" (Rom.1:25) something,

and whatever we worship we will serve, for worship and service are always, inextricably bound together. Whatever most drives us is rooted in worship and whatever we worship drives us. Why? We are "covenantal" beings. We enter into covenant service with whatever most captures our imagination and heart. It "snares" us. Therefore every human personality, every human community, and every human thought-form will be based on some ultimate concern or some ultimate allegiance to something.

### 3. The Psalms-Praying against idols

In the Psalms, the adoration of the people is not only toward God, but also against idols. Ps.24:3-4--Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol... The "kabod" or glory of God is, quite literally, his weightiness, his supreme importance. But idols are good things which get more glory in our eyes than God. Therefore we cannot give God worship unless we identify and remove the idols of our heart. This theme is so crucial to John Calvin in his effort to renew worship Biblically that his whole theology of worship has been called 'the war against idols'.

### 4. The Prophets-Polemic against idols

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, leveled an enormous polemic against the worship of idols. a) First, an idol is empty, nothing, powerless. The idol is nothing but what we ourselves have made, the work of our own hands (Is.2:8; Jer.1:16). Thus an idol is something we make in *our* image. It is only, in a sense, worshipping ourselves, or a reflection of our own sensibility (Is.44:10-13). It has no ability or power of its own (Is.41:6,7); it will eventually rot (Is.40:20) b) But second, (paradoxically) an idol is a spiritually dangerous Dower which saps you of all power. This is a triple paradox. Idols are powerless things that are all about getting power. But the more you seek power through them, the more they drain you of strength. (1) First, the idol brings about terrible spiritual blindness of heart and mind (Is.44:9,18). The idolater is self-deluded through a web of lies (Is.44:20). When we set our 'Worship apparatus' in our hearts upon something smaller than the true God, it produces a 'delusional field' which causes us to live in deep denial of the truth and reality. We deny how important the idol really is to us, yet we deny how impotent the idol really is. Also, we deny the bad effects it is having on us. (2) Second, the idol brings about slavery. Jeremiah likens our relationship to idols as a love-addicted person to his or her lover (Jer.2:25). Once we have come to believe that something will really make us happy, then we cannot help ourselves--we *must* follow our god. Idols poison the heart into complete dependence on it (Is.44:17); they completely capture our hearts (Ezek 14:1-5).

Sum: So the OT is understood grid of idolatry. God is king, but we tried to keep control and power worshipping and serving created things. They in turn, set up a **kingdom** of darkness that blinds and enslaves. The prophets say that someday, the **King** will return and free us. But we can't read the NT through the grid of idolatry, can we? It is seldom mentioned. And moreover, idolatry is not relevant at all for us today, is it?

## B. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY-NEW TESTAMENT

It is typical to think that "idolatry" is mainly an Old Testament phenomenon, but closer examination shows that it is not. A couple of texts provide clues to the fact that pervasive human idolatry was assumed by the New Testament writers.

### 1 John 5:21

The last verse of I John is: "Beloved, keep yourself from idols\*. Now idolatry has not been mentioned by John by name once in the entire treatise. So we have to conclude one of two things. Either 1) he is now, in the very last sentence, changing the whole subject (perhaps as an afterthought, but then he does nothing to elaborate or explain his meaning at **all**)! or 2) he is summarizing all he has been saying in the epistle about living in the light (holiness), love, and truth. I think the latter is more reasonable--but the implications are **significant**. John, in one brief statement, is putting in the negative what he had spent the whole letter putting in the

positive. This must mean that the only way to walk in holiness, love, and truth is to keep free from idols. They are mutually exclusive. Under any failure to walk in holiness is some form of idolatry.

#### *Galatians 4:8-9*

In these two verses Paul reminds the Galatians that they had once been enslaved "to those who by nature are not gods. But... how **is** it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you want to **be enslaved** to them all over **again?**" I know that "*stoichea*" referred to here are much debated, and I won't go into them here. But it seems safe to assume that Paul is saying: don't go back to idolatry. But wait! The Galatians may have once been idolaters in the sense of worshipping figures of metal and wood. But the danger in Galatians is following those who are telling them to be circumcised and who are trying to lure them into a Biblical moralism, and clouding their understanding of justification by faith alone. So how can he talk of this as a *return* to idolatry? The implications are again significant. If anything but Christ is your justification--you are falling into idolatry. If you **sacrifice** to a statue, or seek to merit heaven through conscientious Biblical morality--you are setting up something besides God as your ultimate hope and it will enslave you.

#### *1. Idolatry is at the root of all sin--in fact, it is the only way to understand sin.*

Galatians 4:8-9 sheds light on the classic text of Romans 1:18-25. This extensive passage on idolatry is often seen as only referring to the pagan Gentiles, but instead we should recognize it as analysis of what sin is and how it works.

- v.21 tells us that the *reason* we make idols is because we want to control our lives, though we know that we owe God everything. "*Though they knew God, they neither glorified God nor gave thanks to him.*"
- v.25 tells us the *strategy* for control--taking created things and setting our hearts on them and building our lives around them. Since we need to worship something because of how we are created, we cannot eliminate God without creating God-substitutes
- v.21 and 25 tell us the two *results* of idolatry: (1) deception--"their *thinking* became *futile and their hearts were darkened*" and (2) slavery-"they **worshipped and served**" created things. Whatever you worship you will serve.

No one grasped this better than Martin Luther, who ties the Old Testament and New Testament together remarkably in his exposition of the 10 commandments. Luther saw how the Old Testament law against idols and the New Testament emphasis on justification by faith alone are essentially the same. He said that the Ten Commandments begin with two commandments against idolatry. Then comes commandments three to ten. Why this order? It is because the fundamental problem in law-breaking is always idolatry. In other words, we never break commandments 3-10 without first breaking 1-2. But why would this be? Luther understood that the first commandment is really **all** about **justification** by faith, and to fail to believe in justification by faith is idolatry, which is the root of all that displeases God.

*"All those who do not at all times trust God and do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death, trust in His favor, grace and good-will, but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, obedience, patience, and chastity of all the saints combined. For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham, show and pretense, with nothing back of them.. If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us. or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works. then it is all pure deception outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]...." (Part X. XI) Excerpts from Martin Luther, Treatise Concerning Good Works (1520)*

Here Luther says that failure to believe God accepts us fully in Christ--and to look to something else for our salvation--is a failure to keep the first commandment, namely, having no other gods before him. To try to earn your own salvation through works-righteousness is breaking the first commandment. Then he says that we cannot truly keep any of the other laws unless we keep the first law--against idolatry and works-righteousness. Thus beneath any particular sin is this sin of rejecting Christ-salvation and indulging in self-salvation.

Sum: The Bible does not consider idolatry to be one sin among many (and thus now a very rare sin only among primitive people). Rather, *the only alternative to true, full faith in the living God is idolatry.* All our failures to trust God wholly or to live rightly are due at root to idolatry--something we make more important than God. There is always a *reason* for a sin. Under our sins are idolatrous desires.

## *2. Idolatry is at the root of every heart--it is the only way to understand motivation*

There is another word that is very common in the NT which has strong links to the idea of idolatry. Once we make this connection, we can see an even deeper link between the NT concept of the heart and idolatry.

*"If 'idolatry' is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then 'lust' [inordinate desires], *epithumiai* is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift (See summary statements by Paul, Peter, John, and James as Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff, where *epithumiai* is the catch-all for what is wrong with us.) The tenth commandment [against 'coveting', which is idolatrous, inordinate desire for something]..also...makes sin 'psychodynamic'. It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes in Romans 7....the NT merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires...for lust demandingness, craving and yearning are specifically termed 'idolatry' (Eph.5:5 and Colossians 3:5). --David Powlison--Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair*

The author explains here how idolatry moves us to disobedience and sin. He says that unless we believe the gospel and look to the Lord for our salvation, we **will** look to some idol, and idolatry always leads to 'overdesires'. For example, if we believe we will only be significant if we make a lot of money, we will be in the grip of an over-desire, "drivenness", to succeed in our work.

This is why we can say that beneath the breaking of any commandment is the breaking of the first. Every sin is rooted in the inordinate lust for something which comes because we are trusting in an idol rather than in Christ for our righteousness or salvation. Therefore, in sin we are always 'forgetting' what God has done for us in Christ and instead are being moved by some idol.

This is also why the word "*epithumia* (for idolatrous, inordinate desires) shows up in all the New Testament places that treat Christian character, such as the "fruit of the Spirit"-(see Galatians 5:22ff.) It is possible to have a Pharisaical or superficial compliance with God's law, but out of works-righteousness. This is obedience to the rules, but out of false motives and bad heart-character.

*"Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation." Belgic Confession 24*

The Belgic Confession here states that unless we believe the gospel, we will be driven in all we do--whether obeying or disobeying--by pride ("self-love") or fear ("of damnation"). We may be obeying God, but we will be only seeking to manipulate him--get blessing from him--through our good works. We will not be obeying him out of delight in who he is in himself. So, apart from 'grateful remembering' of the gospel, all good works are done then for sinful motives. Mere moral effort, may restrain the heart, but does not truly change the heart into Christ-like character. Moral effort merely 'jury rigs' the evil of the heart to produce moral behavior, out of self-interest. It is only a matter of time before such a thin tissue collapses.

Sum: This means then, that *idolatry* is **always** the reason **we** ever do anything wrong. Why do we ever lie, or fail to love or keep promises or live **unselfishly**? Of course, the general answer is 'because we are weak and sinful', but the specific answer is always that there is something besides Jesus Christ that you feel you must have to be happy, something that is more important to your heart than God, something that is spinning out a delusional field and enslaving the heart through inordinate desires. So the secret to change (and even to **self**-understanding) is always to identify the idols of the heart.

### **3. Idolatry is at the root of all unbelief and, to some degree, every culture.**

It is not only that idols are the basis for **all** personal sins and problems, but they are also the basis for all social and cultural sins and problems. When an individual makes and serves an idol, it creates psychological distortion and troubles; when a family, a group, or a country makes and serves an idol, it creates social and cultural trouble.

When we read Paul in Ephesians and Colossians **carefully**, we see him talking about 'powers' that sometime seem to be demons, but sometimes appear to be forces that we can convert and persuade. I think that what we see is an example of good things--government, business/capital, the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge--made idols and thus suffused with destructive ('demonic')power. The book of Revelation in particular shows how the **state**--something quite good in Romans 13--can become evil.

Intellectual and cultural idols stem not just from a disbelief in God but from a basic rejection of the basic gospel. If we reject the truth that all our problems come from a depraved heart, we will have to account for it by 'demonizing' some created thing as well as idealizing (**ideologizing**) of some other created thing. So romanticism demonized culture and idealized nature. Marxism demonized the rich and idealized economic and social factors. It believed that if we manipulated them properly, social problems would evaporate.

The following are a list of some of the more obvious social-cultural idols. (Please remember that what is written below are major generalizations. There are many different forms of socialism and capitalism, for example, which moderate **and** improve on the fundamental theme I mention. The idea is to show that most 'ideologies' are 'idolatries'. These overlap. The **first** three are economic-political ideologies: the last two are intellectual-philosophical ideologies.)

a. Fascism makes an idol out of one particular race or nationality or culture. It occurs when a culture teaches individuals to say "I am acceptable because I am of the \_\_\_\_\_ race which is far better than \_\_\_\_\_ race(s)." Closely associated **with** this is the idol of militarism and physical might for coercion. Christianity is neither culturally relativistic nor imperialistic. It knows that not **all** cultures are equally healthy, but that all cultures are deeply stained by sin and must be judged by the Lord.

b. Socialism makes an idol of the state. It occurs when a culture teaches that our main problems are at root **only** social, not spiritual and moral. This view relies overly or exclusively on government solutions to re-engineer society. Christianity understands that our problems are rooted in sin which effects both social systems and individual hearts and will **make** an idol neither out of government nor of private, individual initiative.

- c. Capitalism makes an idol of the 'market'. When a society comes to believe that most or all our problems will be solved by free market competition, it leads people to "worship" success, personal freedom, and the 'almighty individual'. Today, even advocates of the free market recognize the 'cultural contradictions of capitalism', namely, that capitalism and consumerism undermine the very virtues of self-control and responsibility that gave it rise.
- d. Relativism makes an idol out of one's own individual conscience and inner feelings. When a society teaches people "you alone can **determine** what is right or wrong for you, as long as you don't steal others' freedom to have the same choice", then it has made "choice" an absolute value, and the feelings of the heart a god.
- e. Empiricism makes an idol out of nature and scientific investigation. It insists absolutely everything has a natural, scientific cause. Thus it believes science has an answer for **everything** and will open **all** doors.
- f. Pluralism can make an idol out of the government, too. The government is apparently "neutral" toward religion and holds that truth is 'relative'. But that means that no religion or faith has the right to call into question government practices.

*"[When does the pursuit of a legitimate goal become idolatry, or 'ideology'?] An ideology arises the moment the **end** indiscriminately **justifies** every **means**... Thus a nation's goal of material prosperity becomes an idol [the ideology of materialism] when we use it to justify the destruction of the natural environment or allow the abuse of individuals or classes of people. A nation's goal of military security [becomes an idol [the ideology of militarism] when we use it to justify the removal of rights to free speech and judicial process, or the abuse of an ethnic minority.] -- Bob Goodzwaard -- Idols of Our Time*

But while idols are all about getting power *through* power and performance, the Biblical God can only be approached through repentance--a loss of power. While idolatry is the attempt to manipulate God to obtain power and security/salvation for oneself or one's group, the gospel is that we are saved by sheer grace, and thus we surrender ourselves in grateful love and become willing, sacrificial servants of everyone. We now become agents in God's kingdom which comes full of justice and mercy to all who are suffering. The gospel is the end of ideologies.

Sum: At the root of all problems (personal or social), and of **all** non-Christian philosophies and ideologies is the elevation of some created thing to the place of ultimate worship and ultimate arbiter of truth and meaning.

*"The principle crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry. For although each individual sin retains **its** own proper feature, although it is destined to judgment under its own proper **name also**, yet they all fall under the general heading of idolatry.... [All murder and adultery, for example are idolatry, for they arise because something is loved more **than** God--yet in turn, all idolatry is murder for it assaults God, and all idolatry is also **adultery** for it is unfaithfulness to God.] Thus it comes to pass, that in idolatry all crimes are detected, **and** in all crimes idolatry." -- Tertullian. On Idolatry Chap. 1*

*"A careful reading of the Old and New Testaments shows **that** idolatry is nothing like the crude, simplistic picture that springs to **mind** of an idol sculpture in some distant country. As the **main category to describe unbelief**, the idea is **highly sophisticated**, drawing together **the** complexities of motivation in individual psychology, **the social environment**, and also the unseen world. Idols are not just on pagan altars, but in well-educated human hearts and minds (Ezekiel 14). The apostle associates the dynamics of human greed, lust, craving, **and coveting** with idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). The Bible does not allow us to marginalize idolatry to the fringes of life....it is found on center stage."--R. Keyes, "The Idol Factory" in No God but God*

## C. THE CONSTITUTION OF IDOLS



## 1. THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDOLS

### a. Idols form into a system.

How do the particular idol-systems come to be formed in us? How do we come to have our specific idols ?

The world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:16-17) are inextricably linked in their influences to produce idols in us. First, our 'flesh', our sinful heart is by nature an 'idol factory' (as Calvin put it). Second, the "world", our social environment, coaxes us into various idols by model and example and sometimes direct appeal. Our family's idols, our culture's idols, our classes idols shape us either when we embrace them or reject them for the idol-opposite. Third, the 'devil' works in us to stir up and **enflame** desires into idolatrous bondages. If we leave out any one of the three aspects, we will reduce behavior to either "Johnny is bad" or "Johnny is abused" or "Johnny is sick". But all these approaches are simplistic compared to the Bible. None of our behavior is *simply* the result of only: a) our inherent nature, b) our environment, or c) our free choice. The Bible is not *essentialist* ("he was **born** that way, it is hopeless"), *behaviorist* ("he is a victim of what they did to him, it's hopeless"), or *existentialist* ("it's all a matter of his choice; he can be whatever he wants to be!")

*'How do we put together the following three things? First people are responsible for **their** behavioral sins...Second. people with problems come from families or **sub-cultures** where the other people involved also have problems. We suffer and are victimized and misguided by the **destructive** things other people **think**, want, **fear**, value, feel **and** do...My problems are often embedded in a **tight** feedback loop with **your** problems...Third. behavior is motivated by complex, **life-driving** patterns of thoughts, desires, fears, views of the world, and the like, of which a person **may** be almost wholly unaware. How are we... responsible for our behavior [#1], **socially** conditioned [#2], and creatures whose hearts are twisted and complex all at the same time without **any** factor canceling out **the** others?*

*The social and behavioral sciences miss this...Human motivation is never strictly psychological [controlled **primarily** by my feelings] or psycho-social [controlled **primarily** by my environment] or psycho-social-somatic [controlled **primarily** by my biological genetic code]. Human motivation is **always** God-relational [we are controlled primarily by what we worship]. Seeing this, the Bible's view alone can **unify** ~~the~~ seemingly contradictory elements in the explanation of behavior." -- D. Powlison, 'Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair'*

Idolatry can therefore be a useful way to understand very complex, pathological personal and relational patterns of life.

*"The things frequently labeled 'co-dependency' are **more** precisely instances of 'co-Idolatry'. People's typical idol **patterns** often reinforce each other and fit in ~~an~~ uncanny way into a [single, large] idol system creating massively destructive feedback loops. The classic alcoholic husband **and** rescuing wife are enslaved within an idol system whose components complement each other all too well:*

*[1.] **The** idol pattern in **the** husband...**might be** a use of alcohol [a] to serve an **idol** of escape from the pains and frustrations in life, or [b] to serve **an** idol of **self-crucifixion** to deal with his periodic guilt and remorse ...[2.] **The** idol pattern in the wife...**might be** a use of rescuing behavior [a] to serve an idol of personal worth by being a martyred savior of her family, or [b] to serve an idol of security by **having** a male's love **and** dependence on her.*

*Each of their **idols** (and the consequent behavior, thoughts, and emotions) **is** 'logical' within the idol system...Idols counterfeit aspects of God's identity and character...:*

*judge, savior, source of blessing, sin-bearer, object of trust...Each idol in the system 'makes promises' and 'gives warnings'. Service to each idol results in a hangover of misery and accusedness, because idols lie and murder. They are continually insinuated by the one who as a liar and murderer from the beginning."*

"Co-dependency literature often perceptively describes the patterns of dysfunctional idols **which** curse and enslave people (*e.g.* the rescuer or **compulsive** drinker). But the solution [in this same literature] is to offer **different and presumably** more workable **idols**, rather than the Bible's **Christ**....Self-esteem..acceptance and love from new **significant** others, [better jobs and **careers**] create successful versions of the idols '**fear of man**' and '**trust of man**'. **Eufunctional** idols do '**work**' and 'bless' with **temporarily** happy lives (**Psalm 73**)...but the idol system is **intact**.." -- D. Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"

**"The idol begins as a means of power, enabling us to control, but then overpowers, controlling us."**-- Richard Keyes. "**The Idol Factory**" in No God but God

b. Idols have a "near" and "far" dimension.

(1) "**Far idols**" such as power, approval, **comfort**, control are more subtle and basic. They are at the roots of your life--"farther" from the **surface** of things. They are motivational drives. They can work through many 'near idols'. They are dealt with mainly by a process of repenting and rejoicing (See assignment below and next week's "Dismantling Idols" Project)

(2) "**Near idols**" are more concrete and **specific** objects and subjects such as your spouse or your career. Now these things--your business, your **ministry**, your music--are extremely good things that you need to **detach** from the far idols, which are using them. That means they often (even ordinarily) may remain in your life. if they are 'put in their place'. This is what **Augustine** meant when he spoke of the "right **ordering** of our loves".

How do we do this? Basically, you don't want to love a near idol less, but rather come to love and rejoice in God more than you do in it--so you don't try to 'earn your salvation' through it. It is important. therefore, to work on your far idols the most, or you'll feel that your near idol is somehow dirty in itself.

Question your motives, especially when your emotions surrounding your 'near idol' makes you bitter, scared, discouraged. Ask 'Why am I so upset?' **Far** idols give a franticness to our work with near idols. Often, **after** we become Christians (or **after** we get serious about our Christianity) we will have a period of 'disorientation', even a lapse in intensity, as we lose our old idolatrous motivations and learn gradually to pursue our ministry, marriage, work for Christ's sake. But that is an extremely important transition. Jonathan Edwards' insisted that only when we detach our work **from** far idols do we actually do the work for **it's** own sake. "**True**" virtue, is to love your music for its own sake. or your spouse for **his/her** own sake. And you are free to do in the gospel because now you love God for **his** own sake, not just to get heaven and reward from him. That is what the fullness of grace does. Without the gospel, you will do your work 'to get a name' or 'to prove yourself--not for the sake of the work itself.

Sum: Sin cannot simply be resisted at the volitional level through mere will power, but on the other hand, we are not helpless victims. Sin must **primarily** be rooted out at the **motivational** level through the application of gospel-truth. We must **find** what we worship as our functional savior through works-righteousness, in rejection of the gospel of free grace and salvation through Christ. Then we must repent and replace the idol with love and joy in Christ at the same time we are **trying** to change our behavior.

c. Idols create a 'delusional field'.

As we have seen, idols spin out a whole set of assumptions and false definitions of success and failure and happiness and sadness and worth and valuelessness.

*"Your idols define good and evil in ways contrary to God's definitions. They spin out a whole false belief system False gods create false laws, false definition of honor and stigma. Idols promise blessing and warn of curses for those who succeed or fail. 'If I can \_\_\_\_\_ then my life will be valid."*

This is critical to understand. There is legitimate sorrow, and then there is idolatrous. inconsolable sorrow, that is really the 'curse' of the idol. It is saying, "if you don't have me there IS nothing else that can satisfy you!" There is legitimate guilt. **and** then there is un-remediable guilt. When people say: "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself"--they mean that they have failed an idol, whose standards are **different** than God's and whose approval is more important to them than God's.

d. Idols can thrive in a religious environment.

Often it is possible to jettison 'near idols' of sex or money and enter the church, but the 'far idols' may continue to be served and looked to as our *functional* righteousness and 'covering' rather than Jesus Christ. It is quite possible to serve the idol of approval, power, or control in religious forms. The elder brother in Luke 15 was seeking power and control through obeying the father, while the younger brother was attempting it through disobedience. The lack of a clear 'near idol' (like prostitutes) in the elder brother's life masked what he was really about.

## 2. THE DE-CONSTRUCTION OF IDOLS

a. The "Moralyzing" Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among orthodox and conservative Christians can best be called the "moralyzing" approach. Basic analysis: Your problem is that you are doing wrong. Repent! This focuses on behavior--but doesn't go deep enough. We must find out the why of our behavior. Why do I find I want to do the wrong things? What inordinate desires are drawing me to do so? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) to 'repent and change behavior' is insufficient, because the lack of self-control is coming from a belief that says, 'even if you live up to moral standards, but you don't have this, then you are still a failure.' You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all--your particular idolatry.

b. The \*Psychologizing" Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among more liberal religious groups can best be called the "psychologizing" approach. Basic analysis: Your problem is that you don't see that **God** loves you **as** you are. Rejoice! This focuses on feelings, which seems to be 'deeper' **than** behavior--but it also fails to go deep enough. We must also And out the why of our feelings. Why do I have such strong feelings of despair (or fear, or anger) when this or that happens? What are the inordinate desires that are being frustrated? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) 'God loves you--rejoice!' is **insufficient**, because the unhappiness is coming from a belief that says, 'even if **God** loves you, but you don't have this, then you are **still** a failure.' You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all--your particular idolatry.

c. The "Gospel" Approach.

Basic Analysis: Your problem is that you are looking to something besides Christ for **your** happiness. Repent and rejoice! This **confronts** a person with the real sin under the sins **and** behind the bad feelings. Our problem is that we have given ourselves over to idols. Every idol-system is a way of our-works-salvation, and thus it keeps us "under the law". Paul tells us that the bondage of sin is broken when we come out from under the law--when we **begin** to believe the gospel of Christ's-work-salvation. Only when we realize in a new way that we are righteous

in Christ is the idol's power over us broken. Sin shall not be your master for you are not under law, but under grace. (Rom.6:14) You will only be "under grace" and free from the controlling effects of idols to the degree that you have both: (1) repented for your idols, and (2) rested and rejoiced in the saving work and love of Christ instead.

*"If we accurately comprehend the interweaving of...behavior, deceptive inner motives, and powerful external forces, then...what was once 'd y doctrine' becomes filled with appeal, hope, delight and life. People see that the Gospel is far richer than a ticket to heaven and rote forgiveness for oft-repeated behavioral sins....[1. A Psychologizing approach says] 'you feel horribly and act badly because your needs aren't being met--because your family did not meet them'...then it says, 'God accepts you just as you are.'...This is not the Biblical gospel, however.... This approach just soothes the unhappy soul without getting to the source of the pain].*

*[2. In a Moralizing approach] Christ's forgiveness is applied simply to behavioral sins. The solution is typically...an attempt to deal with the motive problems with a single act of housecleaning. There is little sense of patient process of inner renewal...daily dying to the false gods we fabricate.-- David Powlison. "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"*

*"The faith that...is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness...It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others....But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ There is a sense in which the strongest self-love that we can have...is merely the mirror image of the lively conviction we have that God loves us. Moralism whether it takes the form of either denunciation or "pep talks", can ultimately only create an awareness of sin and guilt or manufactured virtues built on will power....We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security not resting on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christian's life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness [some form of idolatry] which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace...-- Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*

## D. A PASTORAL PROCESS WITH IDOLS

### 1. IDENTIFYING YOUR IDOLS

#### a. Using 'Problem Emotions' to identify idols

*"1. Every self exists in relation to values perceived as making life worth living. A value is anything good in the created order--any idea, relation, object or person in which one has an interest, form which one derives significance....*

*2. These values compete....In time, one is prone to choose a center of value by which other values are judged..[which] comes to exercise power or preeminence over other values.*

*3. When a finite value has been elevated to centrality and imagined as a final source of meaning, then one has chosen...a god.... One has a god when a finite value is...viewed as that without which one cannot receive life joyfully. (To be worshipped as a god, something must be sufficiently good....Were my daughter not a source of exceptional affection and delight, she would not be a potential idolatry for me, but I am tempted to adore her in a way...disproportional.)*

*Anxiety | Idolatry and the future |*

[5.] Anxiety becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values....Suppose my god is sex or my physical health or the Democratic Party. If I experience any of these under genuine threat, then I feel myself shaken to the depths.

Guilt/Bitterness [Idolatry and the past]

[6.] Guilt becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values...Suppose I value my ability to teach **and** communicate clearly....If clear communication has become an absolute value for me, a center of value that makes all my other values valuable...then if I [fail in teaching well] I am stricken with neurotic guilt

[7. Bitterness becomes neurotically intensified when someone or something stands between me and something that is my ultimate value.]

Boredom/Emptiness [Idolatry and the present]

[8. To be bored is to feel empty, [meaningless.] Boredom is an anticipatory form of being **dead** To the extent to which limited values are exalted to idolatries...[when any of those values are lost], boredom becomes **pathological** and compulsive....My subjectively experienced boredom may **then** become **infinitely** projected toward the whole cosmos....This picture of **the self** is called **despair** [The milder forms are disappointment, disillusionment, cynicism.]

T.C. Oden. Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia Chap. 6

#### TESTING FOR THEM:

If you are angry. Ask, "is there something **too** important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry--because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:

If you are fearful or badly worried. Ask, "is there something **too** important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared--because something is being threatened which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:

If you are despondent or hating yourself: Ask, "is there something **too** important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so 'down'--because I have lost or failed at something which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:

b. Using "motivational drives" to identify idols.

"An idol is something within creation that is **inflated** to function as a substitute for God All sorts of things are potential idols....An idol can be a physical object a property a person an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, **a pleasure**, a hero....If this is so, how do we determine when something is...an idol?

As soon as our loyalty to anything leads us to disobey God, we are in danger of **making** it an idol....

--Work, a commandment of God can become an idol if it is pursued so exclusively that responsibilities to one's family are ignored

--Family, an institution of God himself, can become an idol if one is so preoccupied with the family that no one outside one's own family is cared for.

--Being well-liked. a perfect legitimate hope, becomes an idol if the attachment to it means one never risks disapproval.

[Idols] are **inflated**...suggesting that the idol will fulfill the promises for the good life....Idols **tend** to come in pairs--[for example] a nearby idol may be a **rising** standard of living, but **the faraway** idol is a semi-conscious belief that **material** success will wipe away every tear... -- Richard Keyes.

"The Idol Factory" in No God but God

"...that most basic question which God poses to each human **heart**. "has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's functional bust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?

Questions...bring some of people's idol systems to the surface. 'To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance?....What do you really want and expect [out of

life)? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success? These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors. (This bears) on the immediate motivation of my behavior, **thoughts, feelings**. In the Bible's conceptualization, **the motivation question is the lordship question. who or what "rules my behavior, the Lord or an idol?"** -- David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"

We often don't go deep enough to analyze our idol-structures. For example, 'money' is of course an idol, yet in another sense, money can be sought in order to satisfy very different, more foundational or "far" idols. For example, some people want lots of money in order to control their world and life (such people usually don't spend their money, but save it) while others want lots of money for access to social circles and for making themselves **beautiful** and attractive (such people do spend their money on themselves!) The same goes for sex. Some people use sex in order to get power over others, others in order to feel approved and loved, and others just for **pleasure/comfort**. The following outline can be helpful in letting people consider different foundational 'idol-structures'. Dick Keyes calls them 'far-idols' as opposed to 'near idols'. Remember, these are all alternative ways to make ourselves **"righteous/worthy"**:

<u>What We Seek</u>	<u>Price Willing to Pay</u>	<u>Greatest nightmare</u>	<u>Others oft feel</u>	<u>Prob emotion</u>
COMFORT ( <i>Privacy, lack of stress, freedom</i> )	Reduced productivity	Stress, demands	<b>Hurt</b>	Boredom
APPROVAL ( <i>Affirmation, love, relationship</i> )	Less independence	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
CONTROL ( <i>Self-discipline, certainty, standards</i> )	Loneliness: spontaneity	Uncertainty	Condemned	Worry
POWER ( <i>Success, winning, influence</i> )	Burdened: responsib	Humiliation	Used	Anger

#### TESTING FOR THEM:

Circle the thoughts that are lodged in your heart:

Power idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I have power and influence over others.

Approval idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am loved and respected by \_\_\_\_\_"

Comfort idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life."

Control idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth **if--I** am able to get mastery over my life in the area of \_\_\_\_\_"

Other related idols:

Helping idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--people are dependent on me and need me."

Dependence idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--someone is there to protect me and keep me safe."

Independence idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone."

Work idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am highly productive getting a lot done."

Achievement idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am being recognized for my accomplishments, if I am excelling in my career."

Materialism idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions."

Religion idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in it activities."

Individual person idolatry: "Life only has meaning/ I only have worth if--this one person is in my life and happy there and/or happy with me."

Irreligion idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and with a self-made morality."

Racial/cultural idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior."

Inner ring idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in."

Family idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--**my** children **and/OR** my parents are happy and happy with me."

Relationship idolatry: idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--**Mr.** or **Ms.** 'Right' is in love with me."

Suffering idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--I am hurting, in a problem--only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt."

Ideology idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if--my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in **influence** or power."

Image idolatry: "Life only has meaning /I **only** have worth if--I have a particular Mnd of look or body image."

Answer these diagnostic questions:

- a. What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?
- b. What, if I failed or lost it. would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live? What keeps me going?
- c. What do I rely on or comfort self with when things go bad or get difficult?
- d. What do I think most easily about? What does my mind go to when I am free? What pre-occupies me?
- e. What prayer, unanswered, would make me seriously think about turning away from God?

f. What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I the proudest of?

g. What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?

Summarize Now that you've answered the questions above, look for common themes. Write below what you think are the "functional" masters? What things tend to be too important to you?

## 2. DISMANTLING YOUR IDOLS

a. First Step - Repent: Taking Down The Idols (Judges 10:10-16; Rom.8:13)

On the one hand, (contra the Psychologizing Approach) you are called to repent. You have been worshipping an idol and rejected the true God. Every idol is the center of some system of works-righteousness by which we are seeking to "earn" our salvation, so you are also **trying** to be your own Savior. So you must repent. But this actually gives much hope--it means there is something you can do. The Psychologizing Approach, though sympathetic, is not truly empowering, because it leaves us feeling like helpless victims. How do we repent?

(1).NAME THE IDOLS (getting specific)

In prayer, name these things to God. Sample prayer language: *"Lord, these are the things I have built my life and heart around..."*

- Name some "Near" idol or idols:
- Name some "Far" idol or idols:

(2).UNMASK THE IDOLS

Idols create "delusions". They appear more wonderful or **all** powerful than they really are. They lead us to deny their hold on us. Stand back **and** get them into perspective. In what ways are your idols distorting your thinking or hiding themselves from you? (Forexample: "My idol of status and money has made me deny how much I hate my job and how much happier I would be in another (but lower-paying) career.")

- *Recognize how weak and poor they are [in themselves].* in prayer, confess that these things are good, but finite and weak, and praise God for being the only source of what you need. Sample prayer language. *"Lord, this is a good thing. why have I made it to be so absolute? Why do I feel so pointless with out it? What is this compared to you? If I have you, I don't have to have this! This cannot bless me and love me and help me like you! This is not my life--Jesus is my life! This is not my righteousness and worthiness. It cannot give me that. But you can and have!"* Write out such a prayer in your own words.
- *Recognize how dangerous they are [to you].* Idols enslave, and they will never be satisfied. Realize how they increasingly destroy **you**. Look and now, in prayer, confess that these things are absolutely lethal. and ask a strong God for his help. Sample prayer language: *'Lord why am I giving this so much power over me? If I keep doing it, it will strangle me. I don't have to do so--I will not do so any longer. I will not let this jerk me around on a leash any longer. This will not be my Master--you are my only King.'* Write out such a prayer I your own words.

*Recognize how grievous they are (to Christ).* Idols ultimately are cruel to the heart of the one who offers us so much. and at such **infinite** cost. Realize that when you pine after idols (in your anger, fear, despondency) that you are saying: *"Lord, you are not enough This is more beautiful, fulfilling, and sweet to my taste than you. You are negotiable, but this is not. Despite all you've done for me, I will only use you*



*as long as you help me get this. You are negotiable, but this is not. You haven't done enough for me--if you don't help me have this, I will discard you.*" In prayer, admit how deeply you have grieved and de-valued Jesus, and ask forgiveness. Sample prayer language: "*Lord I see how repulsive this idol for what it is--an idol. In yearning after this, I was trampled on your love for me. I realize now that the greatest sin in my life is a lack of thankfulness, a lack of grateful joy for what you have done for me*" Write such a prayer in your own words.

b. Second Step -- Rejoice: Replacing The Idols (Luke 10:20; Col.3:1-4)

On the other hand (contra the Moralyzing Approach) you are called to tremendous joy and encouragement. What you have turned from is the beauty, love, and joy of Christ. He offers what you have been seeking elsewhere. He awaits you, he 'stands at the door' knocking (Rev.3:20), seeking a far deeper connection of intimacy with you than he has had previously. It is an appreciation, rejoicing, and resting in what Jesus has done and offers you that will 'replace' the idol. Notice how often (Col.3:1-9; Romans 8:6-13; Hebrews 12:1-3) growth and change is a dynamic of two interactive processes--"put to death" (repentance) and "set your mind above" (rejoicing in what you have and are in Christ). These are not really two separable things. Only rejoicing in Christ strengthens us to admit the worst about out selves in repentance. On the other hand, only the sight of our sin reveals to us how free and unmerited his grace is. Rejoicing and repentance must go together. Repentance without rejoicing will lead to despair. Rejoicing without repentance is shallow and will only provide passing inspiration instead of deep change.

What does it mean to "rejoice" or "set your mind" on Christ? 'Rejoicing' in the Bible is much deeper than simply being happy about something. Paul directed that we 'Rejoice in the Lord always' (Phil.4:4), but this cannot mean 'always feel happy', since he also said that every day he was weighted with concern and anxiety over his flock (2 Cor.11:28-29). Jesus forbid his disciples to rejoice in their power over demons, and insisted that they rejoice over their salvation (Luke 10:20). What you rejoice in is the thing that is your central sweetness and consolation in life. To rejoice is to treasure a thing, to assess its value to you, to reflect on its beauty and importance until your heart rests in it and tastes the sweetness of it.

So "rejoicing" is a way of praising God until the heart is sweetened and rested, and until it relaxes its grip on anything else it thinks that it needs. The rejoicing is thus not strictly a second distinct step after repentance, but rather it completes the repentance. (In the same way, the Christian repentance is not distinct, but rather is begins the rejoicing!) Why? In Christian repentance--we do not 'take our sins' to Mt. Sinai, but to Mt. Calvary. Sinai represents only the law of God, and makes us fear God will reject us. But Calvary represents both the law of God and the his commitment to save us no matter what--even if his Son has to fulfill and pay our debt to the law. 'Going to Sinai' with our sins means we use the painful fear of rejection to motivate us to change. 'Going to Calvary' with our sins means we use gratitude for his love to motivate us to change. The free love of Christ means that in disobedience, you have not just broken the rules, but spumed the One who lost his Father rather than lose you.

The Moralyzing Approach, then, though challenging, is not in the end truly cleansing, because it only makes us afraid of the consequences of our sin, rather than disgusted with the sin itself as grieving and dishonoring to our Savior. Thus it is only as we rejoice in the absolute certainty of his love for us that we can truly repent. In the gospel, it is the thing that most assures us (free grace) that most deeply convicts us of sin. How do we rejoice? 3 ways:

(1).REJOICE IN PARTICULAR.

To replace idols so they cannot grow (back), you must learn to rejoice in the particular thing that Jesus brings that replaces the particular idol of your heart. Whenever you see your heart in the grip of some kind of disobedience or misery, some temptation, anxiety, anger, etc.. always ask: (1)How are these effects being caused by an inordinate hope for

some-one or some-thing to give me the what only Jesus can really give me? and (2) How does Christ give me so much more fully and graciously and suitably the very things I am looking for elsewhere? Then Rejoice and think of what he has done and what he has given you. Here are some examples:

(a). If you struggle with temptation. (often it is a near idol linked to a far idol of comfort)--let Jesus *entice* you with his life. Rejoice in the gospel until you see its beauty. (1) How are these temptations being caused by an inordinate hope for some-one or some-thing to give me the comfort and consolation that only Jesus can really give me? (2) How does Christ give me so much more fully and graciously and suitably the very things I am looking for elsewhere? Rejoice and think of what he has done and what he has given you. Let him entice you with his beauty. Sample rejoicing prayer for times of temptation: "*Lord, only in your presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forever more (Psalm 16:11) yet here am I trying to find comfort in something else. Why rake in a mud puddle when you have set a table for me (Psalm 23:5) filled with your love, peace, joy? This thing I am tempted by is just a pleasure that will wear off so soon--it is a sham and cheat, while your pleasure, though it may start small will grow on and on forever (Prov.4:18). And remove my idols of pleasure, which never can give me the pleasure I need.*" Pray this prayer when tempted or one you write out yourself.

A meditation for rejoicing in Jesus (and the gospel) when tempted--read John 6:5-13:32-40. See Jesus feeding people with his bread, the only bread that will not leave you hungry (Jn.6:35). Meditate on John 6 and write out a rejoicing prayer that replaces temptation thoughts.

(b). If you struggle with anxiety, (often out of a far idol of control) let Jesus *comfort* you with his care. Rejoice in the gospel until you are humbled enough (to see you don't know best) or valued enough (to see that he could not forget you).

(1) How are these anxieties being caused by an inordinate hope for some-one or some-thing to give me the control over my life and environment only Jesus can really give me? (2) How does Christ give me so much more fully and graciously and suitably the very things I am looking for elsewhere? Rejoice and think of what he has done and what he has given you. Let him quiet you with his loving power. Sample rejoicing prayer for times of anxiety: "*Lord, I live by your sheer grace. That means though I don't deserve to have things go right, yet I know you are working them all out for good (Rom.8:28) because you love me in Christ. All my punishment fell into Jesus' heart--so you only allow bad things for my growth, and for loving wise purposes. I can relax, because my security in life is based neither on luck, nor hard work, but on your gracious love for me. You have counted every hair on my head (Matt.10:30-31) and every tear down my cheeks (Ps.56:8)--you love me far more and better than anyone else loves me or than I love myself. And remove my idols of security--which never can give me the security I need.*" Pray this prayer when anxious or one you write out yourself.

A meditation for rejoicing in Jesus (and the gospel) when anxious--read Luke 8:22-25; Mark 4:35-41. See Jesus assuring them of his care. Meditate on this and write out a prayer that replaces anxious thoughts.

(c.) If you struggle with anger and pride. (often out of a desire for power), let Jesus *humble* and soften you with his mercy. Rejoice in the gospel until you are so.

(1) How are this anger and hardness being caused by an inordinate hope for some-one or some-thing to give me the power and significance that only Jesus can really give me? (2) How does Christ give me so much more fully and graciously and suitably the very things I am looking for elsewhere? Rejoice and think of what he has done and what he has given you. Let him humble and soften you with his grace and mercy. Sample rejoicing prayer for times of anger: "*Lord, when I forget the gospel I become impatient and judgmental of others. I forget that you have been infinitely patient with me over the years. You are slow to anger and rich in love (Psalm 145:8). When I am anything other*

than tender-hearted and compassionate to people around me, I am like the unmerciful servant, who, having been forgiven an infinite debt, is hard toward his fellow debtor (Matt. 18:21-35). I live completely and solely by your grace and long-suffering, and I praise you for it. Tenderize my heart toward others as I do so. And remove the idol of power—the need to get my own way—which is making me so **hard** toward these people."

Pray this prayer when irritable and angry or one you write out yourself:

A meditation for rejoicing in Jesus (and the gospel) when cold or angry--read Matthew 26:36-46. See Jesus being let down by his disciples, but still giving them credit for their willing spirits (Matt. 26:41). Remember that you have fallen asleep on him so often. Meditate on this and write out a prayer that replaces hard-hearted thoughts:

(d). If you struggle with rejection and a sense of worthlessness (often out of a desire for approval). let Jesus assure you of his love. Rejoice in the gospel till you are **affirmed**.

(1) How is this despondency being caused by an inordinate hope for some-one or something to give me the sense of approval that only Jesus can really give me?

(2) How does Christ give me so much more fully and graciously and suitably the very things I am looking for elsewhere? Rejoice and think of what he has done and what he has given you. Let him assure you with his fatherly love. Sample rejoicing prayer: "**Lord**, when I forget the gospel I become dependent on the smiles and evaluation of others. I let them sit in judgment on me and then I **hear** all their criticism as a condemnation of my very being. But you have **said**, 'now there is no **condemnation**' for me (Rom. 8:1). You delight and sing over me (Zeph. 3:14-17), you see me as a beauty (Col. 1:22). Why do I pant after the **approval** of the serfs when I have the love of the King? ***Ironically***, I am being a lousy friend--because I am too hurt by criticism to either learn from it or give it to others (for fear of getting it back). Oh let me be so **satisfied** with your love (Psalm 90:14) that I no longer respond to people in **fear of** displeasing them, but in love, committed to what is best for them. Remove my idols of **approval--which** can never give me the approval I need" Pray this prayer when feeling hurt and rejected or one you write out yourself.

A meditation for rejoicing in Jesus (and the gospel) when hurt or rejected--read John 15:9-17; 17:13-26. Listen to how Jesus **talks** about you to his Father. Think of what you mean to him, what he is willing to do for you. Meditate of this and write out a prayer that replaces despondent thoughts.

It should be clear how to reflect on your heart in such a way that you can deal with its idolatrous 'motions' and effects. You may have other problems besides the four mentioned above. For example, you may have a **particular** problem with guilt over the past, or with boredom in general, and so on. Follow the same pattern you see above:

(a) What is the 'far' idol motivation (e.g. power, approval)? What is the 'near' idol it is attached to (e.g. success at work, dating a particular person, ministry)?

(b) How does Jesus particularly provide what the idols cannot? (1) Pray to him, thanking him for it, and (2) **find** some passage of Scripture in which he very **visibly** and concretely demonstrates this gift or quality. Meditate on it.

## (2). REJOICING IN PROCESS.

Meditation. Essentially, rejoicing in Christ is worship. You can get no relief simply by 'figuring out' your idols and simply saying, "but Jesus gives me peace that this idol cannot." You have to actually get the peace that Jesus gives, and that only comes as you worship. The 'Rejoicing in Particular' exercises are just abstractions that will not effect you unless as you pray and praise and meditate the Spirit inscribes these **truths** on the heart (Eph. 1:18ff.; 3:15ff). These worksheets can give you the truths you need, but through the Spirit you have to "pray them in". That takes time. It is a process.

So it is not only important to spend time repenting and rejoicing in **fixed** times of solitude **and** prayer. You must also "catch" your heart falling into idolatry during the

day, and you must draw on your hard work of reflection by learning to quickly repent/rejoice your heart into shape *on the spot*. This means that everyone should have a series of "Quick Strike" prayers that go against your main idols and the delusional fields/negative patterns that may happen during the day. (You may wish to write these prayers out on a card.) Often the prayers might be accompanied by a Bible passage or verse.

The following is a sample of one person's "Quick Strikes". Make up your own.

When filled with anxiety, thinking: "If I slip up, if I make a wrong move here, I could lose everything." But think or pray instead, "All the things I have are really **gifts** of grace. They aren't here because of my performance. but by God's generosity. He loves me enough to lose his only Son for me, surely he will continue to give me what I need. Console yourself"

When filled with pride and anger, thinking: "I am not getting what I deserve! People are not treating me right! Who do they think they are?" But think and pray instead, "All the things I have are really gifts of grace. I have **never** gotten what I **deserve--and** I never will! If God gave me what I deserved, I'd be dead. Humble yourself."

When filled with guilt, thinking: "I **have** blown it! My problems mean he's abandoned me." But think or pray instead. "All the things I have are the results of God's grace. I never earned them to begin with--so I couldn't have **un-earned** them. He accepted me **long** ago even though he knew I would do this. This was **in** my heart all along--I just didn't see it, but he did. He's with me now. Be confident. Self."

When filled with boredom and lethargy, thinking: "Sure, I'm a Christian. Sure I have good things. So what?" But think or pray instead. "All the things I **have--every** one--is a gift of grace. The very fact I am a Christian is a miracle. Be amazed. Be in wonder. Self."

Conclusion: All we have been **trying** to say in this last section is well **summarized** by a few famous lines in a poem by John Donne. Meditate on it and make it a prayer--

Take me to *you*, imprison me.  
For I, except you enthrall me, never *shall be free*,  
Nor *ever* chaste, except *YOU* ravish me.

## APPLYING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 6 -

## TO WHOM? OUR 'MISSIONAL' CONTEXT

### INTRODUCTION

The third aspect of application has to do with the intellectual and cultural context of the people to whom you are seeking to 'apply Christ'. And here we have an epochal change occurring.

### THE IDEA OF THE 'MISSIONAL CHURCH'

#### A 'Christianizing' Society

In the West for nearly 1,000 years, the relationship of Christian churches (at least Anglo-European churches) to the broader culture was a relationship known as "Christendom." The institutions of society "Christianized" people, stigmatizing non-Christian belief and behavior.

What do we mean by 'Christianized'? Social institutions instilled: 4 *Christian* cultural '*Stories--*' (1) Be a good person; (2) Our nation/culture is the Christian therefore superior one. (3) It's 'un-American' to disbelieve the Bible. *b)* Ethics--Basic Christian ethics (but always with some glaring omissions, see below). *c)* *World-view* categories--Basic Christian categories of God, sin and law, created but broken human nature, linear view of history, rewards and punishment in the afterlife. *d)* Imagination--Many Biblical themes deeply permeate the imagination and thus art. To 'Christianize' without regenerating the heart through grace is to create what today would be called a conservative or traditional person. Before the 1960's they were just normal.

Though people were "Christianized" by the culture they were not regenerated or converted with the Gospel. The church's job was then to challenge persons into a vital, living relation with Christ. Christianized people were deeply programmed to 'show up' at church. 4 First, if you wanted to be considered a legitimate part of the establishment of any town, you needed to belong to a church or synagogue. You were excluded from social, civil, cultural power if you didn't toe the line. Example: Peter Drucker trying to get a mortgage in Hoboken, NJ in the 1930's. *b)* Second, people were programmed to 'showed up' at all major transitions with a deep internal need for the church's blessing and help: marriage, death, first children, and times of crisis. When they did show up, the church's job was to teach/exhort people into personal faith. The essential message: 'You know what you should be doing. Get to it'. The difference between committed Christians and non-Christians was superficially slight. (Example: My in-laws.) This is an uncomplicated process that relied more on guilt than on persuasion, attraction, and illumination. The kind of people the church got to 'work on' were traditional and conservative people.

#### The Decline of 'Christendom'

Christendom is essentially over. The broader cultural institutions do not 'Christianize' the folk for the church so that the church can simply re-confirm and process them. The new 'folk culture', with its stories, ethics, world-view categories has profoundly changed. It is not necessarily gone from 'conservative' to 'liberal', but is fundamentally secular and individualistic. (Leading sometimes to 'conservative' and sometimes to 'liberal' positions.)

This has not happened everywhere at once. In much of the U.S. South and even the Mid-west, Christianity as a 'folk culture' is still pretty strong. The local 'ethos' puts pressure on people to believe in the old "Christendom" way. But in virtually all of Europe, Canada, Australia, and in the much more culturally powerful Northeast, Upper Mid-west, and West Coast, Christendom

is very, very gone. Thus there are two 'nations' in the U.S.<sup>36</sup> Wolff is right in saying that the remnants of old Christendom are still eroding.

'Why'? Many Christians see 'Christendom' as basically a good that needs to return, but that's not at all clear. There were great advantages to Christendom. There was a common language for public moral discourse with which society could discuss what was 'the good.' As we know from history, the older paganism and other non-Biblical religions countenanced more oppression and cruelty than did Christianity. Even a society of non-regenerated 'Christianized' people immediately got rid of human sacrifice etc and slowly got rid of slavery, child labor. etc.

But the disadvantages were quite severe. Christian morality without gospel-changed hearts often led to cruelty and hypocrisy. a) First, there was widespread nominalism. Cultural coercion toward church involvement produces many people with 'the form but not the power' of the faith. Christianized but non-Christian people (unconverted) lead inconsistent lives, coming to church on Sundays but perpetrating injustice **during** the week. Also, morality without grace leads to narrow-mindedness. Think of how the small town in Christendom treated the unwed mother or the gay person. b) Secondly, under Christendom the church was often silent against the abuses of power of the ruling classes over the weak. Whenever the church 'gets in bed' with the power establishment, it 'goes blind' and fails to be prophetic. Classic example: The church in New England led the fight against slavery but slavery was of no economic benefit to those in power there. The church in the South defended slavery but slavery was critical for the wealthy to stay in power there. Racism, slavery, inhumane punishment, women and children as chattel--all of these things were completely natural in the world at large **until** the gospel and early Christianity challenged them all. But where Christianity became entwined with the 'establishment', the church became silent over many of these evils. Many in the West can't forgive the church for that. This history is a major reason for loss of credibility of the Christian faith. c) Third, Christian morality without the transformed identity from grace also leads to cultural imperialism. (Christian groups and nations are considered superior to non-Christian ones.) In *fairness*, *all* cultural identities not based in an experience of grace lead to superiority and oppression. But when Christianized people act this way, it virtually destroys the credibility of the Christian faith to many. Sum: "Christendom" contained the seeds of its own destruction. For these reasons and others, the church in Europe and North America has been losing its privileged place as the arbiter of public morality since at least the mid 19th century. The decline of Christendom has accelerated greatly since the end of WWII.

#### The *new* 'missional' context

The British missionary **Lesslie Newbigin** went to India around 1950. There he was involved with a church living 'in mission' in a very non-Christian surrounding culture. When he returned to England some **30 years** later, he discovered that the Western church now existed in a non-Christian society as well, but it had not adapted to its new situation. Though public institutions and popular culture of Europe and North America no longer 'Christianized' people. the church still ran its ministries assuming that a stream of 'Christianized', **traditional/moral** people would simply show up in services. Some churches certainly did 'evangelism' as one ministry **among** many. But the church in the West had not become completely '*missional*'--adapting and reformulating absolutely everything it did in worship. discipleship, community, and senice--so as to be engaged with the non-Christian society around it. It had not developed a '**missiology** of western culture' the way it had done so for other non-believing cultures. Rather than adapting its message and ministry to the new situation, it just speaks as it always did. What is it to be 'on a mission field' or 'in a **missional** context'?

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<sup>36</sup> 'There is a fundamental schism in American cultural, political, and economic life. There's the quicker-growing, economically vibrant...morally relativist, urban-oriented, culturally adventuresome. sexually polymorphous. and ethnically diverse nation...and there's the small town, nuclear-family, religiously-oriented, white-centric other America. {with}..its diminishing cultural **and** economic force....[T]wo nations...' Michael Wolff, New York, Feb 26 2001, p. 19.

Newbigin points out some of the following: a) First, on a mission field any visitors (and all believers for their first 5-10 years in the faith) in a worship services were *completely* non-Christian in their cultural stories, ethics, world-view, and imaginative structures. So preaching and worship had to be 'missional'--engaged with non-Christian culture. Evangelism could not be confined to a 'program', but had to permeate all the services and meetings of the church. b) Second, on a mission field discipleship could not be confined to 'private world' skills as it was in the West (Bible study, prayer). In a 'missional' context discipleship had to spell out how Christians in their daily lives could live in a radically non-christian society without leaving it and yet still be distinctively gospel-centered. It had to spell out (1) which parts of the culture could be embraced, (2) which ones accepted but re-interpreted, (3) which ones rejected. In the West discipleship did not have to analyze world views and culture. c) Christian fellowship in a missional church was now not simply a set of supportive relationships. Christian community now had to be a distinct counter-culture that could show the larger society the values of God's kingdom. Communal life together had to display how the the gospel transformed and beautified all human relationships--personal, racial, economic. etc. Christians now lived their lives according to a different 'story' than the culture around them, and they had to exhibit the implications of that story in every aspect of their individual and corporate lives. Sum: In a 'missional church' there generally was no western-style 'evangelism department'! Literally everything about the church was engaged in embodying the gospel to the world around it.

In general, however, western churches are not responding well to the challenge. Mainline Protestant churches, to their credit, recognized the huge cultural shift and tried to adapt, but did so by over adapting to 'early modernity'. In the early 20th century, they largely jettisoned the supernatural aspects of the historic faith, and sought to re-interpret Christianity on an empirical basis. So they dropped the idea of an inspired Bible, largely disbelieved in the miracle of the resurrection, etc. Sadly, the mainline church 'hitched its wagon' to a rationalistic era of secularism that is now becoming passe. Meanwhile, their adaptation made the church so much like the surrounding culture that it lost any reason for being. Mainline churches have lost 1/2 or more members in past 30-40 years, warning us about the dangers of over-adapting to the new situation.

Conservative evangelical churches, to their credit, recognized the danger of over-adapting, but has largely continued the Christendom model. a) The small but powerful "Christian Right" seems to essentially be calling for the re-institution of Christendom. oblivious to its problems and abuses. b) More important for our discussion--the average church is still in the functional Christendom model on the local level. It still simply exhorts and processes people with traditional values into stronger commitment. Examples: 1) "4-Laws" and "EE, popular "gospel presentations" still basically assume Christian world-view categories and the personal 'story' of a traditional, Christianized society (i.e. there are moral absolutes and your greatest aspiration is to be 'good'). So nearly all "evangelism" models assume the Christendom model and pretty much only "work" in the South and the Midwest. 2) Christian discipleship materials are still heavily oriented to private world (not vocation) and assume basic Christian ethics. Example: 10 Basic Steps and sexuality. 3) Worship services at conservative churches are confusing and/or offensive to all but Christian or very conservative people. (Example: Ed Hindson). Example: Scottish friends, deeply orthodox (Presbyterian!) Christians who are socialists. When they come to the U.S. they feel ostracized. Christianity here, holding on to the Christendom model, has been contextualized for traditional, conservative people. and can't reach beyond.

Problem: In some parts of the U.S. (again--in the still conservative "Heartland") it is quite possible to be a processing center for conservative Christianized people. In Midwest and South vs. West and Northeast, in rural vs. urban and ex-urban, and in over age 45 vs. younger groups--there are still a lot of people with basic Christianized categories. It is still possible for a conservative church to grow by merely attracting other evangelicals in the area with its superior program and converting mainly tradition-minded people. Wolff is right that this is eroding. because a) this kind of church can't maintain the kind of Christians live and work in

the heart of the culture-forming institutions. Thus our art, media, journalism, academia, government, etc. is completely secular. And *b)* this kind of church certainly can't convince contemporary, secular skeptics about the truth of the gospel.

Personal note: Redeemer is flooded with new people constantly. In every part and aspect of the church we have people who don't believe or who in 'spiritual pilgrim-mode'. Who's "doing the evangelism"? What is interesting is that every single member of the **staff** is essentially working to educate, equip, nurture, support believers. There isn't a single staff person whose job it is to go and 'win the lost'. So why are there more 'spiritual seekers' around than I have ever seen in a congregation? It is because, to some degree, the church *itself* has a 'missional form'. That does not mean that everything we do is designed to 'convert people', but that every part of the church is being **contextualized** and adapted to simply be Christian 'gospel people' of service in a culture of people not Christianized and who have modern and 'post-modern' sensibilities.

## THE ELEMENTS OF A 'MISSIONAL CHURCH'

### 1. Discourse in the vernacular.

In Christendom there was less difference between the language inside and outside of the church. Biblical terms and concepts were part of common discourse. Documents of the early U.S. Congress, for example, are riddled with allusions to and references from the Bible. In our current situation all that has changed. A missional church which wants to really engage with the culture around it must be very deliberate in its efforts to speak intelligibly.

- First, the missional church does not avoid the use of Biblical **terminology**, but takes great pains to explain such terms in ways that are readily understandable to those without theological background. Especially avoid citing the Bible or making explanations with tone 'Everyone intelligent knows this!' Watch how you cite authorities.
- Second, the missional church avoids ever **talking** as if non-believing people are not present. We always, always expect to be overheard by members of the non-believing press. If you speak and discourse as *if your* whole neighborhood is present (not just scattered Christians), eventually more and more of your neighborhood will **find** their way in or be invited. Why? 1) Po-mo people 'try on' Christianity through dozens of 'mini-decisions'. They want to see how it works. 2) Speak in this way and Christians will feel free to include church events as part of their friendship-building. Otherwise, they simply won't!
- Third, the church avoids 'tribal' language--unnecessarily stylized evangelical pious jargon and archaic language that seeks to set a 'spiritual tone.' (e.g. typical 'prayer language')
- Fourth, the church avoids 'we-them' language--disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs, and dismissive, disrespectful comments about those who differ with us. Constantly anticipate and address the concerns, objections, and reservations of the skeptical or of 'spiritual pilgrims' with the greatest respect and sympathy. (Again--if the gospel is affecting you, you will be deeply sympathetic with those who struggle to believe. Never haughty.)
- The missional church avoids sentimental, pompous, emotionally manipulative 'inspirational' talk. Instead we engage the culture with gentle, self-deprecating but joyful irony the gospel creates. There is a true 'gospel-irony' and realism that is a mixture of humility and joy. We also work to not 'run ahead' of non-believers in being so emotionally expressive that we 'leave them behind' or scare them.
- Unless all of the above is the outflow of a truly gospel-changed heart, it is all just marketing and 'spin.'

### 2. Enter and re-tell the culture's stories with the gospel

In Christendom it was possible to simply exhort Christianized people to "do what you know you should do." In such a situation ministry was a matter of exhortation (often with a heavy reliance on guilt.) There was little or no need for deep listening nor deep persuasion. The basic 'story' of people in a Christianized or traditional culture said "I'm seeking to be a good and



moral person, a good member of a good family." The church only had to say: "Without God your story can't have a happy ending. You can't be good enough without the forgiveness and power of Christ." In a missional church, however, preaching and communication should always assume the presence of skeptical people, and gospel presentations should engage the stories of the culture that is, not the culture that **was**.

- First, the **missional** church must enter the stories of the surrounding culture. This takes real listening. To "enter" means at least to build relationships to people who don't believe. But even more it means to show sympathy toward and deep acquaintance with the literature, music, theater, etc. which expresses the existing culture's hopes, dreams, heroic narratives, and fears.
- Second, the **missional** church recognizes the difference between the older stories and the newer stories.
  - The older culture's story was: to be a good person, a good **father/mother**, **son/daughter**, to live a decent, merciful, good life.
  - Now the culture's stories include-- a) to be *free* and self-created and authentic (theme of freedom from oppression); identity is a never-ending journey. You never '**find** yourself or 'arrive', **b)** to make the world safe for everyone else to be the same (theme of inclusion of the 'other,' justice). **c)** relationships are more important than truth,
- Third, the missional church learns how to "*re-tell*" the stories of the surrounding culture with the gospel. That means to **both** challenge **and** yet 'resolve' each story with Jesus. We must show how only in Christ can we have freedom without slavery. Only in Christ can we truly embracing of the 'other' without injustice. Only in Christ can we have a *personal truth* (incarnation) and *a* truth that does not oppress (the cross.) It means to show how the story lines of your story only resolve themselves in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Fourth, manner: 1) conversational vs. rhetorical (great antipathy to 'inspirational' or 'grand style' or anything too controlled or 'spin'). 2) ironic-joyful vs. sentimental or cynical (Example: 'this beautiful hymn'). 3) Remember A-B-C-D doctrine progression. 4) redemptive-historical vs. expository/topical preaching. Neither moralistic or inspirational nor rationalistic.

'Translation is a highly problematic enterprise. The original is assumed to be inadequate...or inappropriate, but at any rate ineffective for the task at hand. Thus a peripheral role comes to be assigned to the original mode. In addition, translation forces a distinction between the essence of the message and its cultural presuppositions, with the assumption that such a separation enables us to affirm the primacy of the message over its cultural underpinnings. The translation involves some degree of cultural alienation on the part of the translator....Thus mission as translation makes the bold, fundamental assertion that the recipient culture is the authentic destination of God's **salvific** promise...

"Paul faced the combined demands of Jewish **particularity** in seeking messianic consolation and the Greek expectation of philosophical emancipation by **affirming** the cross....He writes to the church at Corinth: "For **the Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks. Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**" (1 Cor 1:22-24) The gospel is thus recognized by both Jew and Greek as [**both** challenge to and] a confirmation of their respective particularity..."<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Theologically train lay people for **public** life and vocation

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<sup>37</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Orbis, 1989), pp.31,34.

In Christendom the church could afford to confine its discipleship and training of believers to simply private-world skills such as prayer, Bible study, and evangelism. This was because they were not facing radically non-Christian values in their public life--at work, in their neighborhood, and so on. They did not need (or they did not think they needed) to reflect deeply about a Christian approach to business, **art**, the use of community resources, race relations, and so on. In a missional church, however, surrounded by a very non-Christian culture, believers need much more by way of training. Goal: to avoid assimilation, separation, or ghettoization.

- First, in a missional church, the laity needs theological education about how to '**think**Christianly' about all of life, public and private, and about how to work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know: a) what cultural practices are common grace and to be embraced, b) what practices are antithetical to the gospel and must be rejected, c) what practices can be **adapted/revised**.
- Second, in a missional situation, lay people renewing and transforming the culture through distinctively Christian vocations must be lifted up as real 'kingdom work' and ministry along with the traditional ministry of the Word.
- Finally, Christians will have to use the gospel to demonstrate true, Biblical love and tolerance in "the public square" toward those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which opposing views show toward Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main 'defeater' of the gospel in the non-Christian west.

#### 4. Create Christian community which is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive.

In Christendom, 'fellowship' was basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support and accountability. That is necessary, of course. But when surrounded by a very **non-Christian** culture, Christian community takes on additional importance.

- First, in a missional church Christian community must go beyond to embody a 'counter-culture.' showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power.
  - With sex: We avoid both the secular society's idolization of sex and traditional society's fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different.
  - With money: We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, the economically and physically weak.
  - With power: We are committed to power-sharing and relationship-building between races and classes that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ.
- Secondly, a missional church must be more deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches and more deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches. This kind of church is profoundly 'counter-intuitive' to American observers. It breaks their ability to categorize (and dismiss) it as liberal or conservative. Only this **kind** of church has any chance in the non-Christian west.

#### 5. Practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level.

In Christendom, when it seemed like 'everyone was a Christian', it was necessary (perhaps) for a church to define itself over against other churches. That is, to get an identity you had to say, "we are not like that church over there. or those Christians over here."

- Today, however, it is much more illuminating and helpful for a church to define itself over against 'the world'--the values of the non-Christian culture. It is important that we not spend our time bashing and criticizing other kinds of churches. That simply plays into the common 'defeater' that Christians are all intolerant.

- While we have to align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate and reach out to and support the other congregations and churches in our local area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.

### Case Study

Let me show you how this goes beyond any program. These are elements that have to be present in every area of the church. So, for example, what makes a small group **missional**? A **missional** small group is not necessarily one which is doing some kind of specific 'evangelism' program (though that is to be recommended.) Rather, 1) if its members love and **talk** positively about the city/**neighborhood**, 2) if they speak in language that is not **filled** with pious tribal or technical **terms** and phrases, nor disdainful and embattled language. 3) if in their Bible study they apply the gospel to the core concerns **and** stories of the people of the culture, 4) if they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature and **art** and thought of the surrounding culture **and** can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically, 5) if they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money and purity and respect with regard to opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures, 6) they do not bash other Christians and churches-- *then* seekers and non-believing people from the city A) will be invited and B) will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues. If these **marks** are not there it will only be able to include believers or traditional. "Christianized" people.

### "The Dream of the Rood": Example of 'Entering' **but** 'Retelling' a Culture's Story

*I was reared up, a rood. Then I saw, marching toward me, mankind's brave King. **The** young Hero--who was **God** almighty--stripped Himself, eager to **mount** the gallows. **unafraid** of the sign to many: He would set free **mankind**. I raised the great **King**, liege lord of **the** heavens. They drove me through with dark nails: on me are the deep wounds manifest widemouthed hate-dents. I shook when his arms embraced me but I **durst** not bow to the ground. Stand fast **!** must*

*How they mocked at us both! I was all moist with blood **sprung** from **the** Man's side after he sent forth **His** soul. Darkness covered the bright radiance of the Ruler's body. Shadows **lowered**, dark under the clouds.*

*They lifted **Him** down from the **Leaden** **pain**, left me standing in a **s w a t** of **blood**. I was all wounded with shafts. They set to contrive Him a **tomb**. **carved** it of bright stone, laid in it the **Bringer** of **victor**y, **spent** from the great struggle. They began to speak the grief-song. Their hearts were sick to **death**, their most high **Prince** **they** left to rest there with scant retinue.*

*He tasted death; nevertheless, **the** Lord arose in **His** great might to succor **men**. Then He ascended **into** Heaven. He **shall** return **again** to earth, seeking out **mankind**, on Doomsday. May **the** Lord be our **friend**, He who once suffered on the **gallows-tree**. The **Son** mighty in battle, came **back** victorious.*

-- The Dream of the Rood (the Cross) 8th cent A.D.

## APPLYING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 7 -

## TO WHOM? STRATEGIES FOR ENTERING AND CHALLENGING A WORLD-VIEW

### INTRODUCTION

We live in 'post-modern' and 'post-Christendom' times, in which our listeners increasingly do not share a Christian 'world-view'. Application becomes far more complex. 'Adapting to the audience' means that we have always be doing 'apologetic preaching'. We must be very aware of the non-Christian world-views around us, 'in' which many of our listeners live. We must, in short, 'contextualize' our message to these world-views. Otherwise we **will** soon **find** that we are just talking to ourselves.

The question in mission and ministry is: **how** can I adapt my communication *of* the gospel without changing the content of the gospel? If you adapt too much, you compromise the gospel, and if you adapt too little, you are adding 'the traditions of man' to the gospel.

### A. 'CONTEXTUALIZATION'

#### 1. *Difficulties.*

"Contextualization" refers to the process by which we 'incarnate' the Christian faith in a particular culture, addressing a particular world-view. That is, we communicate it and practice/embody it in forms that the 'receptor-hearers' can understand. There are many difficulties surrounding the word 'contextualization'. Nevertheless, evangelicals by and large are no longer naive in thinking about this subject. (See Grant Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, chapter 15; and Harvie Conn. *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*) I think that high view of the Bible demands that we believe in contextualization. Why? The Bible gives us great freedom in the details of living. (That is why it can be used in all cultures.) Since the Bible does not tell us specifically how to dress or specifically what kind of music to listen to, there is freedom to shape dress and music in such a way that both honors the Biblical boundaries and themes and yet fits a culture. To deny that much of our Christianity is culturally relative is to elevate human tradition to divine authority and to therefore dishonor the Scripture.

#### 2. *Principles.* (C.Kraft, *Communication Theory and Christian Witness*.)

a. Receivers automatically interpret communication from the perspective of their own context. It is an extremely tiring and difficult process for a receptor to comprehend communication which is not provided within his or her frame of reference. Can you imagine reading a technical computer journal if you have no background at all in the field. The technical journal makes no **effort** to begin with a beginner's frame of reference. Soon you, the receptor, "tune out" and become numb. By a "frame of reference" we mean a person's culture, beliefs, language, vocabulary, life situation, perceived needs, and so on.

b. There are two basic approaches to communication: sender-oriented and **receptor-oriented**. When the communicator designates his frame of reference as the one in which communication takes place, the receptor must make most or **all** the adjustments. As we have seen, this is quite tiring, difficult, and often unsuccessful. The receptor in this case is in a dependent position. He must ask many questions, listen, deal with many strange and uncomfortable concepts and conditions. look up many words, ask for a great deal of help, and constantly check and re-check meanings. In short, the receptor is forced into a vulnerable position.

However, when the communicator designates the receptor's frame of reference as that in which the communication will take place, the roles are reversed! Now, the communicator is in a dependent position. He must ask the questions, he must listen, he must deal with many strange and uncomfortable concepts and conditions, look up many words, ask for a great deal of help, and constantly check and re-check meanings. He has become vulnerable.

"Sender-oriented" communication is "1-way" communication for the sender, but "2-way" for the receptor. But "receptor-oriented" communication is "2-way" communication throughout. The latter is much harder and more complex for the sender, but far more comfortable for the receptor and far more successful.

c. God's communication approach: receptor-oriented.

In the Bible we see that God adapts his message without changing it. In Deut.18:15-19, we see that God sends his message through the medium of a human prophet when the people complain that they cannot listen to his voice directly. He does not simply maintain the same communication channel and form. In Phil.2:6-7, we see that incarnation is a form of communication. Jesus entered into our framework. We could not see God's glory face to face (Ex.33) but now we behold his glory in Christ (John 1:14).

In I Cor. 9:19-22, we see the principle of communication that Paul practiced throughout the book of Acts. There we can see significant adaptations in his preaching from audience to audience. He varied his use of emotion and reason, his citation of authorities, his vocabulary, his choice of points of contention (avoiding unnecessary issues), and his **identification** of the hearers' concerns, hopes, and **needs**.<sup>38</sup>

In countless ways, God adopts familiar conventions, literary genres, and terms that the hearers could relate to. For example, when God entered into a relationship with Israel, he adopted a cultural form, the specific format of the Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties of the second millennium B.C. John the apostle takes over the Logos concept from modern Greek philosophy. The very concept of Biblical theology shows us that God unfolds revelation in a history, in stages, with each stage adapted to the ability of the people to whom he speaks.

d. We must nevertheless be "**message-centered**" not "**context-centered**".

Many people get quite nervous when they hear a call to being "receptor oriented", because they believe being "sender-oriented" is to be "message-centered". Many authors, in the name of being receptor-oriented or "**contextualized**", very obviously have sought to change rather than adapt the Biblical message. We here the Bultrnannians saying, "modern man can no longer accept the miraculous element in Scripture." Thus the final authority in communication is the context, not the message.

No wonder many evangelicals get nervous about audience adaptation. In reaction to **this kind** of distortion, many evangelicals and Reformed pastors are quite adverse to any talk of being "receptor oriented", of adapting our communication to the perceived needs and frame of reference of non-believers. But this is to misunderstand the options. We do not have 2 possible methods in communication ("Word" or "God" centered vs. "receptor-oriented" or "**man-centered**"). If that were so, we would have the following positions:

Message-centered-----or-----Audience-centered

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<sup>38</sup> Jay E. Xdams, Studies in Preaching: Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul vol. II (hesbytenan and Reformed, 1976).

But this is an inadequate framework. How can we explain the difference between two communicators, both of whom are true to the infallible Word of God, yet one of which is clear and persuasive and the other obscure and boring? They are both "message centered", are they not?

I think it is better to think of four possibilities:

"Sender oriented" °  
"Message centered" °

A

TRADITIONIST

"Sender oriented" °  
"Context centered" °

B

MANIPULATOR

"Receptor oriented" °  
"Message centered" °

C

PREACHER

"Receptor oriented" °  
"Context centered" °

D

ACCOMMODATOR

A. is a "traditionalist", concerned for truth but only with his own needs and perspectives in view. B. is a manipulator, thinking only of his own goals and using any message to achieve his ends. D. is an accommodator, doing nothing but re-enforcing the audience and telling them what they want to hear. But C. is a preacher. He is concerned with truth, but he enters the non-believer's frame of reference to change both the frame of reference and the receptor, not to accommodate him, to simply reinforce the frame of reference. Because the preacher believes in truth, he can change the frame of reference, but because he is a servant, he can enter it.

We, of course, are promoting option C! We have an absolute standard, an unchanging body of truth--the Word of God. But we also have a job, namely, to communicate it to changeable people who live in time, and thus our communication of that truth must be changing constantly. The C approach equally stresses formulation of a message from the Bible and communicating that message in an understandable form.

But, in my opinion, the C approach is definitely a minority position. Generally, we have "Conservatives" operating on A principles and "Liberals" operating on D principles. The B option is in some ways the most insidious. In this approach the communicator simply tells the audience what it wants to hear in order to get them to follow his purposes. This inevitably leads to lies and misrepresentations.

But most evangelicals must be concerned about becoming mired in the "A" approach. It makes us wooden. We are lost if receptors begin to ask us questions which relate to their own perceptions and agendas rather than ours. It disrupts us and we have to simply repeat ourselves or must start over. We cannot really answer questions! The A approach is somewhat based on the "boxcar" approach to word-meanings (pp.50-51). In that approach, "meaning" is contained in words. But Kraft points out that, since words change in their meanings constantly, it is people that contain meaning. Words are not "boxcars" but are "arrows" that draw the meaning out of a person's **mind**. Meanings are attached to words, not contained in them. In that case, the formulation of the message (content) is not the only aspect of communication. The choosing of communication mode (form) that fits the **people/receptors** is just as critical.

A terrible consequence of the "A" method is that preaching becomes a spectator sport. The stated goals are life-change, but the actual goal is a performance which reinforces and wins the applause of the congregation who then reward the preacher through compliments,

attendance, and attracting other attenders (who are unhappy with their own preacher's performance). No one is changed.

The difficult goal of contextualization is to neither over nor under adapt to a culture. We are to adapt enough to enter it, but resist enough to challenge it. If we don't contextualize the gospel, we will treat some human tradition as part of the gospel and as a consequence we will treat the distinctives of our own culture as idols. But if we over "contextualize", we lose the distinctiveness of the gospel and we buy into the other culture's idols. There is no 'safe' extreme--either way we lose the gospel!

## B. KNOW HOW **TO** ENTER A WORLD-VIEW

### 1. Gaining plausibility.

Receptors will "tune out" a message unless the communicator gets within the receptor's range of tolerance. How?

- a. First, you must speak the receptors' language, by using words and references they can understand. Abstract learners are more moved by facts and argument than more interactive and concrete-relational learners. ("LOGOS")
- b. Second, you must use the right non-verbal communication. Non-verbal codes can be broken down into a (depressingly) complex outline. They include: space, timing, gestures, facial expression, posture, tone of voice, pitch, rhythm, stress, etc. Innumerable complex relationships show emotion and opinion. Different audiences have different sets of codes. No preacher can analyze for himself whether he is expressing emotion appropriately without feedback from lay people. All sorts of verbal or non-verbal codes that are highly inappropriate will be "tuned out", and you won't know what hit you ("**PATHOS**")
- c. Third. The preacher must be credible himself. His model or example--is a major part of the communication, because words do not contain meanings, people do. In a large group setting this means a speaker's reputation can be helpful. Most audiences spend a long time deciding what they think of the speaker! If there is already personal knowledge of the speaker outside of the setting the credibility on non- is set! It is very difficult to change this credibility (or its lack) by a poor or great communication. But personal transparency, an evident knowledge of people's hearts--this can bring about credibility even with a strange audience. This is the aspect of persuasion which Aristotle called "ETHOS". Adaptation in this form is subtle. For example, in more secular cities, 'irony' is valued--a very hard thing to create in yourself!

### 2. Gain credibility.

The second way to enter a world view is to "come in" to that world-view or framework, at least for a visit, as you talk to the people you want to reach. You don't just come in (as we said above) in your style and tone and outward look. You also have to come in to the framework intellectually, even if you are trying to change it. How?

- a. First, at least, you must show a remarkable knowledge of the world-view. This means you quote the lyrics, music, TV shows, authors, pundits, thinkers well who represent that **world-view**. You use illustrations that resonate to people of that world-view. (This assumes you read a lot and talk a lot with people from the world-view.) This also means that you never make orthodox Christian statements and just go on without showing you know how outrageous, difficult, or troubling those statements are to the world-view. There is nothing more maddening than to feel ignored. To say, "well Jesus took the wrath of God on the cross" and never say--"I know this is outrageous to many people today" is an insult.
- b. Second, you must also show real sympathy for the world-view to a great degree. We fail to do this is by (1) not posing the objections of the **world/view** in their most credible way. If we set up a "straw man", easily knocked down, it won't be convincing. We also fail (2) by not expressing real sympathy and affirming the truth of the objections wherever you can. In sum: You can't talk like: 'well, this is just the way it is' or even worse, to give no hint you know anyone thinks any other way.

Do not have favorite other world-views (eg. post-modern vs. eastern vs. modern, etc.).

d. However, the most important way to enter a world-view is to move from the RIGHT known to the RIGHT unknown.

(1). Part of any culture's belief system is "right". That is, by common grace and common revelation, there are some convictions or 'values' that are highly similar to those of Christian world-view. Romans 1 tells us that everyone "knows" the true God down deep. That means that in some way they will be living as *if* the Biblical God exists, because at a deep level they "know" it. So every culture will admit and acknowledge parts of God's truth.

(2). Find those truths that they hold in common with the Bible and **affirm** them. Cite authorities they trust and then show how (if anything) the Bible also asserts these truths in more vivid and rich and full ways. Don't *start* by challenging the world view. You start by "entering" and you enter by coming in and agreeing and **affirming** some part of it. For example, talk to secular kids about sex ethics showing Bible's lack of prudishness, open discussion of the magnificence of sexuality. Then challenge their flippancy and licentiousness. Note: This doesn't mean that **their** lack of prudishness was based on the right things--it just is a common place to stand. But don't take this approach with Muslims or Hindus! Start by talking of the sanctity of sex.

(3). Then (see below) begin to show how their views of God do not square with these truths and convictions. Begin to show them what they don't know.

e. Last, it is important to address what are called "conscious needs". This is often put forth as the main or only way to reach secular people. It is very important that you show a familiarity with people's hopes and fears. Absolutely. That is really just common sense, and you can see Paul adapting to felt needs in his different speeches in Acts to different classes of people. But (1) if you just talk to 'felt needs' without truly **entering** the world-view intellectually and communicatively (see above) and (2) if you then fail to challenge the world view (see below), an emphasis on 'felt needs' will end up being just a marketing approach that develops a clientele but does not produce conversions or disciples.

f. Note: "The Perspectives" and Entering a World-View

If someone asks: "why should I be a Christian?" There are (using Frame's three perspectives) three basic ways to answer:

**Rational answer:** "Because there are reasons." This is an upper-income, western, modern answer. It looks to thinking, evidence, arguments.

**Situational answer:** "Because we are your people, and God has made us a good people: we love each other." This is more of a traditional, non-Western culture answer. It looks to community, to family, to inherited responsibilities.

**Existential answer:** "Because God has changed me. I experienced power and love and joy." This is an answer that many more intuitive cultures (and 'post-modern' culture) looks to.

A preacher cannot buy into any one of these sources of authority completely, or it has 'sold out' to the culture, but preachers will **definitely** have to adapt, to 'lead in' with the most culturally appropriate. Using the Perspectives. Traditional cultures tend to be more easily approached through the doctrinal door (guilt vs. forgiveness), while moderns are best approached through the pietist door (sadness vs. happiness) while post-moderns are often best approached through the cultural-transformationist door (freedom vs. oppression). It is much more complicated than this, however. There is not time to go into this here. But in general, we tend to often force the door on people that we think they **lack**, rather than entering their mind and heart by their door and leading them to see the 'rest' of God's truth. In other words, a preacher may try to push an individualistic yuppie group to see the importance of the kingdom of God by pushing the cultural-transformationist door. But by going in through 'sonship', you can get to racial reconciliation and radical care for the poor.

## C. KNOW HOW TO CHALLENGE THE WORLD-VIEW



1. *First, identify the real, basic existing commitments of the hearers.*

Show them what ideas, what goals, what things they really rely and base their lives on. Identify them clearly and demonstrate their insufficiency. When a communicator seeks a change, he or she must recognize the already existing life-commitments. Depending on the kind of audience, this can be done in a fairly intellectual way or in a very concrete way. For example, one audience must be shown that they are committed to the basic goodness of human nature. Another audience needs to see that they rely on their own wisdom and competence to make decisions for themselves. Different kinds of arguments will be necessary for removing each life-commitment. Christians as well as non-Christians can be 'grown' when you repeatedly show them that their real commitment is not to the gospel of Christ's **finished** work but to works-righteousness.

2. *Second, de-stabilize by showing the inadequacy or incompatibility of the existing commitments with their own principles.* The fundamental way to arouse interest in the gospel is to show a person a tension between the "right" things they know to be true (see above) and their denial of the Biblical, Christian God. For example, show people who don't believe in the sovereignty of God that they are just kidding themselves about their true position. It's all up to them. now, to not make a mess of their lives! Think of how now you know what an unwise jerk you were 10 years ago: now realize that you will 15 years from now feel the same way about the person you are today. You are, therefore, **always** a jerk. We need a God who is in charge of our lives YET one who paradoxically maintains our freedom of choice. If there is no God, we are either all determined or totally in the driver's seat--both are in-supportable. You are only now thinking of this. To live without the sovereign God of the Bible from here on in will be difficult, if you are thoughtful. This doesn't prove he exists. but it should move you to hope he does. Do you?

Another factor in 'de-stabilizing' people's world-views is through unexpectedness. Whenever people's expectations and stereotypes are fulfilled, change is much less likely. If we want change, we must destroy stereotypes and expectations about what the gospel and what Christianity is. This is one reason why with post-modern and secular people it is so crucial to distinguish the gospel from 'religion'.

3. *Third, re-stabilize with Christ, re-establishing 'equilibrium'.* To "re-stabilize" you must do two things: a) First, you must provide a new view of God (the Biblical one!) that is true to their "right known" things (the common commitments) and that provides a balance and a basis for them. But b) second, you must anticipate the cost of changing over to this new world view and provide new 'rewards' in Christ that outbalance the cost of change.

Christian preaching is not only intellectually de-stabilizing but emotionally de-stabilizing. When you show liberal social activists that their skepticism about God leaves them without a basis for their **moral** outrage, you are also calling them out of a very comfortable situation. They have other liberal friends who will think they are nuts if they 'go religious'. They have nearly complete freedom to do what they want sexually. You will have to show them ) When you discuss the cost of the recommended change, you must show the more-than-commensurate reward. When a communicator shows a felt need can be met through a change, you must realize that the receptor is weighing the cost that it will require. Essentially, the Christian communicator upsets the old equilibrium and replaces it with a new one.

(Reading: C. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*. 1983: *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, 1996 Part V- "Cultural and World View Change")

## D. EXAMPLES

### 1. *The Reality of God.*

Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.

Annie Dillard lived by a creek in the mountains of Virginia in order to observe "nature". She was horrified by the violence. She came to realize that nature was completely and only ruled by one thing--the power of the strong over the weak.

*Don't believe them when they tell you how economic and thrifty nature is. Say you are the manager of the Southern Railroad. You figure that you need engines for a stretch of track...that's a mighty steep grade. So at fantastic effort and expense you have shops make 9,000 engines...you send all 9,000 out so they crash collide, derail, jump, jam and burn--and at the end you have three engines left...that's the number you need for the run. You go to your board of directors, show them what you've done [to get those 3 great engines]. You know what going to say--what kind of way is this to run railroad? But is it better to run a universe that way? "Evolution loves death more it loves you or me [or any one]....I had thought to live by the side of the creek in order to shape my life to its free flow. But I seem to have reached a point where I must draw the line. I must part ways with the only world I know...Look: Cock Robin may die the most gruesome of slow deaths, and nature is no less pleased. The sun comes up, the creek rolls on, the survivors still sing. But I cannot feel that way about your death nor you about mine, nor either of us about the robin's! We value the individual supremely and nature values him not a whit. I look...as though I might have to reject this creek life unless I want to be utterly brutalized.*

*Either this world, my mother, is a monster, or I myself am a freak.*

*Consider the former: the world is a monster....There is not a people in the world that behaves as badly as praying mantises. But wait. you say, there is no right or wrong in nature: right and wrong is a human concept! Precisely! We are moral creatures...in a universe that is running on chance and death, careening blindly from nowhere to nowhere, which somehow produced wonderful us...This world runs on chance and death and power...but I cherish life and the rights of the weak vs. the strong. So I crawled by chance out of a sea of amino acids, and now I must whirl around and shake my fist at that sea and cry SHAME!...We little blobs of soft tissue crawling around on this one planet's skin are right, and the whole universe is wrong. The world is a monster.*

*Or consider the alternative..*

*Nature is fine...our feelings are just freakishly amiss. The frog that the giant water bug sucked had a rush of feeling for about a second before its brain turned to broth. I however, have been sapped by various strong feeling about the incident almost daily for years....All right then--it is our emotions and values that are amiss. We are freaks--the world is fine! Let us all go have lobotomies, to restore us to a natural state. We can leave the library then, go back to the creek lobotomized., and live on its banks as untroubled as any muskrat or reed. You first.*

**Entry Point: A belief it is wrong for strong individuals or groups to oppress weaker individuals and groups.** 1) We all know that it is utterly natural in this world for the strong to eat the weak. That is the very essence of how evolution 'works'--the survival of the fittest. 2) We also believe that oppression is wrong, that while it is perfectly natural for the strong to eat the weak, yet it is deeply wrong when strong human beings or human groups oppress the weak. **Challenging Point:** 1) But if nature is all there is, why would it be 'wrong' for strong humans to trample weak ones? How could we possibly know that nature is abnormal (??) unless there is some standard outside of nature (a supernatural standard) that tells us. 2) If your premise (that there is no super-nature or God) leads you to conclusions you know are not right (that my sense that there is moral injustice is an illusion)--why not change the premise? 3) The Bible makes sense of things: a) if there is no God. there'd be no way to know nature is abnormal. b) if there was no Fall, there'd be no way to explain why a God would make a world like this. But the Bible tells us the world is created yet fallen. If you say, a) nature is full of violence. but b) we shouldn't live that way--you are assuming and believing and living as if the Biblical God exists. It is not honest to live as if he is there and yet not acknowledge him.

## 2. Doctrine of Judgment

Arthur Miller After the Fall

For years I looked at life like a case at law. It was a series of proofs. When you are young, you prove how brave you are, or *smart*; then, what a good lover you are. Later you prove what a good father or husband you are. Finally, prove how wise, or *powerful* or whatever. But underlying it all. I see now. there was a presumption That one moved...on an upward path toward some elevation where. I don't know *what*..I would be *justified* or condemned--a verdict *anyway*. I *think* that my disaster really began when I looked up one *day...and the bench was empty!* No judge in *sight*. And all that remained was the endless argument with *oneself...this* pointless *litigation* of existence before an empty *bench*..Which of course, is *another way* of saying--despair.

Entry Point: Meaning in Life 1) Citing Arthur Miller *itself* is an entry point. 2) Miller shows that we all need to believe in some kind of external standard in order to have meaning in Life. We are working so hard--but for what? Unless there is a judge, some objective moral standards, there can be no sense of moving "upward" or forward. Challenging Point: The 'empty bench' is the secular view of the world. But to say that '*everything* is relative' is to be shut up to your own endless internal argument, because you will never be able to stop striving. Sum: If your premise (that the universe's bench is empty) leads you to a conclusion you know isn't true (that there is no meaning in life, that there is no reason to go on)--why not change your premise?

Miroslav Volf. Exclusion and Embrace

My thesis is that *the* practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance...My thesis will be unpopular *w/* many in the West...But *imagine* speaking to people (*as* I have) whose cities *and* villages have been *first plundered*, then *burned*, *and* leveled to the *ground*, whose daughters *and* sisters have been raped, whose fathers *and* brothers have had their throats slit..*Your* point to them--we should not retaliate? Why not? I say--the only *means* of *prohibiting* violence by us is to insist that violence is only legitimate when it comes from god..Violence thrives *today*, secretly nourished by the belief that god refuses to take the sword...*It* takes the quiet of a suburb for *the* birth of the thesis that human *nonviolence* is a result of a God who refuses to judge. In a scorched land--soaked in the blood of the innocent, the idea will invariably die, like other pleasant captivities of the liberal *mind*...if God *were* NOT angry at injustice *and* deception *and* did NOT make a *final* end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship.

Entry Point: Peacemaking: suffering of the oppressed. 1) One of our very biggest problems today is how to get people who deeply differ to live together in peace--how to stop the endless cycles of vengeance and violence. 2) Most secular people believe that religion only makes the cycles of violence worse. It would be better for peace if more people were religious skeptical like most *Western* intellectuals are. Challenging Point: 1) This is a naive view, held by people who themselves have not suffered violence. 2) If I am violated, only a deep belief in a God of justice will enable me to refrain from picking up the sword and rendering my own justice. 3) The only way to non-violence is belief in a God of judgment and vengeance!

## 3. Authority of the Bible

Entry point: Desire for a personal relationship with God. Wouldn't you want to have a God with whom you can have an intimate, living, personal relationship? Challenging Point: If you want a personal relationship, the other person *will* have to be able to contradict you. If a *wife* can never contradict her husband, you don't have a real personal relationship (e.g. 'The Stepford Wives') Now. if you pick and choose what you can believe in the Bible and what you can't believe (on the basis of modern thinking or personal feelings). then how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? Only if God can be or say things that outrage you *will* you know you have a real God and not a *figment* of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal. mystical relationship with God. It is the pre-condition.

#### 4. *Election and the Sovereignty of God* (See the example above under "Challenge")

Entry Point: A love of grace. If you have a God, wouldn't you want that God to be a God of grace, who loves you freely? Challenging Point: Why are you a Christian and your neighbor is not? Unless you say, "just because God opened my heart", then you have to say that you are a Christian because you are (even slightly) more open, more repentant, more humble.

Entry Point: A desire to respect the 'other'. Don't you want your relationship to God to humble you and provide a basis for respect and mutuality with 'the other'--the person of other faiths and cultures? Challenging Point: If I believe I am predestined--then when I talk to a non-Christian, there can be no superiority. This person could be far more wonderful, moral, wise than me. Other religions lead you to believe that in some way you must be superior--because you believe and the others do not. But election leads us to absolute respect for the 'other', the unbeliever.

Entry Point: A love of mystery. "Well, but then this is unfair." Absolutely right that this is a problem. Challenging Point: But the problem mainly comes because of a premise that you have sneaked in. You figure that if God doesn't open hearts on the basis of merit, **that** therefore his choices are arbitrary. But here's where mystery comes in. I don't know how, but when we see the whole picture, we won't think he's been unwise or unfair but completely wise and fair. So say the prophets and the apostles.

#### 5. *Reality of Hell*

Entry Point: Freedom. Challenging Point: The C.S.Lewis depiction of hell in *The Great Divorce* in which the people trapped in hell are there through denial, delusion, and self-inflicted misery analogous to addictions. Understand sin as slavery. The wages of sin is slavery, blindness, bondage. We see it on earth. Hell is just the same dynamic stretched out eternally, because we go on forever. God holds people responsible enough and lets them be free enough to create their own eternal misery through choosing the proud and selfish way.

Entry Point: The Love of God and Grace. Challenging Point: "I don't believe that God would let anyone go to hell. I don't think hell is the consequence of sin." Ask them: "What did it cost your God, then, to love us and embrace us? Where was his agony, the nails and thorns? What did he have to do in order to love us?" The only answer is "I don't think that was necessary". How ironic. In the effort to make God more loving (by removing hell as the punishment for sin) you have made him less loving. The worship of any God-without-hell will be ethical, cognitive, impersonal. You can be grateful that he is so accepting, but you will not respond to him with passion and intensity and wonder. His love is *not* "so amazing, so divine--demands my soul, my life, my all". The 'sensitive' approach to hell makes God impersonal. The classical Christian God, however, has to suffer on the cross to save us from the inevitable consequence of sin--hell.

#### 6. *The Uniqueness of Christ*.

Entry Point: Inclusivity. Challenging Point: This is the only way to believe in grace without universalism. If you don't have to believe in Jesus, then good works is enough. And if good works is enough, then the way **God** accepts people is performance. Somewhere there is a 'cut off point for moral performance, or goodness of heart, etc. That is quite exclusive. What if you were born into an abusive family? What chance do you have for being a kind, nice person? It's not fair. The Jesus-gospel is the only religion that even claims justification by **grace/faith** alone. Not "the good are in and the bad are out", but the humble are in and the proud are out.

Entry Point: Humility; honesty. "How can you say that your way is right and everyone else's is wrong?" Challenging Point: But you are doing the same thing only worse. Example: Are religions all like the blind men describing the elephant--each one sensing only part of the elephant. but no one seeing the whole truth? Or are religions **all** Like a road to the top of the mountain. taking different paths but reaching the same summit? The only way you could tell these parables is if **you** can see the whole elephant or **you** are at the summit. In other words, you are **saying**, "my relativistic way is right and you are wrong." Your position assumes greater spiritual knowledge than any of the world's religions. You are saying, "my take on religious reality is right, and yours is wrong"--and yet you tell Christians they cannot say the same thing. At least Christians are being honest about their 'exclusivism' but you are not.

### 7. **The Hypocrisy of Cynicism.**

C.S.Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

*You cannot go on explaining away forever, or you will find **that** you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things forever. The whole point of seeing through something **is** to see something [else] through it. It **is** good that you can see through a **window**, because the garden beyond is opaque. But if you see through **everything**, then **everything is transparent, and a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. So to 'see through' all things is the same as not to see.***

Entry Point: Need not to be taken in: Disdain for sentimentality. Christianity is not religion! Religion says people are either good or bad. Religion says you can improve yourself if you try really, really hard. Religion and moralism leads to 'inspirationalism', and sentimentality and a denial of the frustration and disappointment and relentless brokenness of life. But the alternative to religion can never be deep irreligion and cynicism. Challenging Point: 1) But the answer is not a universal cynicism. There is no such thing. 2) Hiding in the heart of the average cynical doubter is a deep faith in your own competence to determine all truth. 3) They hypocrisy of 'committing to nothing' is revealed if you **think** out the implications of your claims. If, as Nietzsche says, all truth claims are really just power grabs, then so is his, so why listen to him at all? If, as Freud says, all views of God are really just psychological projections to deal with our guilt and insecurity, then so is his. so why list to him at **all**? If, as the evolutionary psychologists say, what my brain tells me about morality, love, and beauty is not **real**--chemical reactions designed to pass on my genetic code--then so is what their brains tell them about world. so why listen to them at all? In **end, to see through everything is not to see.** 4) Cynicism lives only by refusing to apply the same razor edge to itself as it does to **all** else. Hiding deep inside its cover of non-commitment is a powerful faith in your own ability to judge right from wrong, to de-construct **all** phoniness.

## E. WESTERN **SOCIETY'S** "WORLD-VIEWS"

Unfortunately. pluralism means that there are multiple 'world-views' out there in the typical audience in North America. In order to 'enter and change" the world view we need to understand their shapes.

### 1. TRADITIONAL **CULTURE**

Who? Less technologically advanced places. More **rural/small** towns.

IDENTITY.

Duty defines you. You have a duty to your people. your **family**, and you find your meaning and fulfilment in fulfilling that. There is not a lot of talk about individual identity, which is less important than the **tribe/people**. Example: homosexuality is unmentionable.

VALUE.

'Give me something that is the right thing to do.'

RELATIONSHIPS.

The most important relationships are people you are born into relationship with--family, clan. You honor through an act of will. "Storge"-based (Lewis)

KNOWLEDGE/COMMUNICATION.

"Concrete". - Acts 16: The Phillipian jailer, who didn't seek God. Very stable, not reflective.

The blue-collar worker. Key: Give me something that is right and that produces character. Paul showed him 'songs in the night' and saved his life.

IDOLS.

Authority. Collectivistic. Impersonal. Blind duty How? Moralism--Forgiveness gospel. "you know you should be good, but you aren't--you need Jesus to be good enough." Apologetics not necessary. Usually only Protestant evangelical Christianity vs. other religion.

MINISTRY OVERBITE. (The danger of over-contextualization) 1) "Normative/Prophetic" side of preaching--Biblical doctrine. 2) Individual pastoral/chaplain care. You are the authority. 3) Many non-believers already in churches. Balance: Show Christ as meaning of every text: show them nature of sin as self-salvation, not breaking rules.

## 2. MODERN CULTURE

Who? More technologically advanced places. More suburban. Older (over 40).

IDENTITY.

Desires define you. You have a duty to discover your own deepest feelings and dreams and you find your meaning and fulfillment in fulfilling that. There is lots and lots of talk of individual identity which is more important than any group or covenant. **Example**: homosexuality is something "discovered". If I am gay, I must fulfill that.

VALUE.

"Give me something that gets me to my personal goals".

RELATIONSHIPS.

The most important relationships are people who help you to your personal **goals--who** give you good feelings and emotions. "Eros"-based (Lewis)

KNOWLEDGE/COMMUNICATION.

"Rational" - Acts 16: Lydia. who was very good and **seeking** intellectual answers to philosophical questions. Reflective, mildly **seeking**. Business-type. Key: Give me something that works and makes sense rationally? Does it get my life under control to help me to my goals?

Paul gave her a Bible study and proved Jesus to her.

IDOLS.

Feelings. Individualism. Faith in scientific technique for everything. Moralistic relativism -- Freedom gospel/Forgiveness gospel depending on success level. Apologetics necessary. Especially evidences for Christ.

MINISTRY OVERBITE. 1) "Situational/Kingly" side of preaching--application. solving problems. 2) Stress ministry to 'felt needs', well done. Balance: Show **Christ/gospel** as the solution to every problem (vs. common virtue); show sin is self-salvation, not **failing** to be successful at life.

## 3. POSTMODERN CULTURE

Who? More technologically advanced places. More urban. Younger (under 40).

IDENTITY.

You define yourself through choice. *With postmodern consciousness...we realize increasingly that there **is** no core essence to which one must be true. What emerges **is** a pastiche personality, a social chameleon constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation* (Kenneth Gergen, The Saturated Self.) Less talk of identity. Example: homosexuality is 'constructed', chosen.

VALUE.

"Give me something that moves me."

RELATIONSHIPS.

The most important relationships are people you are committed to--who you both enjoy and learn with. "Philos"-based (Lewis). Not as will-based as traditional nor feelings-based as modern--more a conscious choice. Thus friendships are more important than family or lovers.

## KNOWLEDGE/COMMUNICATION.

"Intuitive" - Acts 16: Pythoness, who was very troubled and exploited by spiritual and human masters. Besperately seeking, yet hostile. Artistic type. Key: Tell me a story that moves my whole being. Does it free me from my false masters? Paul removed the exploitation--spiritually and socially.

## IDOLS.

Images. Art. Self-expression. Experience. Lack of individual responsibility. **Cynicism.**

Cultural/group identity.// Freedom gospel only is effective. Apologetics necessary--presuppositional not so much evidences until much later.

MINISTRY OVERBITE. 1) "Existential/Priestly" side of preaching--stories and experiences. 2) Stress small groups, multi-cultural community, lay leadership--all deeply based on friendship (very organic) rather than program (inorganic). 3) Include non-believers and believers. Balance: Show Jesus-worship vs. Other-worship as the key to life: show sin is self-salvation. not whatever!

CONCLUSION: Is Po-Mo a whole new era or just a world-view among a) elites, b) creatives, c) generationX, in the d) west? But through technology and culture, it will have broad impact. Nevertheless, in our current world, we expect to have these world-views living side by side. Implications--do not gear church in totally to any one generation or people group. But contextualize mildly to the one(s) most seeking to reach.

## F. A Case Study: Redeemer's Contextualization.

New Yorker cover Oct 9 2000

- Multi-ethnic vs. Anglo, N.European: A disdain for niceness, courtesy, modesty
- Mixture of values from rich and the poor (hip-hop, opera) but not from middle class (Twila Paris)
- Ironic vs. sentimental: cynicism, de-bunking. disdain for the obvious in **at** or communication ("Why am I here? My agent said it would be good for my career." Outtakes)
- Suspicious vs. trusting: ostensibly no authorities, hatred of 'spin' and even polish (though inconsistent)
- Transgressive' to traditional values:
- neither wholesome nor 'slutty' (to consider yourself a sinner is to transgress the old essentialist standards. but not to transgress the *idea* of transgression)
- extremely moral in transgressive way for **rights** of oppressed (though inconsistent)

Do we aim for the cultural 'heart', leaders or do we aim for the temporary outsiders from the more traditional values/middle class who are **coming** through the city.

(Reading: G. Himmelfarb. One Nation. Two Cultures, 1999)

New York 'Professional culture' *profile*

- Expert culture. Min implies: low volunteerism (except social). Expects of quality. intelligence.
- Living in career. Min implies: evangelism throe vocational networks. **discipling** for work.
- Meritocracy. Min implies: quality will be as important as relationships
- Sexually active. Min implies: not prudish, but very frank. out-celebrate them on sex.
- Freedom/privacy idolatry. Min implies: shift from 'not really good' to 'not really free'
- Rootlessness. Min implies: ground historically: cell groups, liturgical renewal.
- Post-modern cynicism: Min implies: quality without polish;
- Less linear/rational: Min implies: **pressup** apologetics: allow process for conversion
- Love of diversity. Min implies: out-celebrate diversity with gospel.
- Social concern. Min implies: out-celebrate mercy and justice with gospel.

A Quick ToDo List for Post-Modern Ministry in NYC

- Apologetics is constantly necessary, but it should be mainly presuppositional. Show that relativism is intolerant. *e.g. To say all religions are alike is to refuse to listen to their voice. \**
- The 'freedom gospel' rather than 'forgiveness gospel': "you know you should be free but you aren't--sin keeps you a slave. You need Jesus to be free."
- Stress small groups over all other programs. *- Builds community.*
- In preaching. Jesus is not teacher of principles (for traditionalists) or healer of hurts (for moderns) but the savior in history. Religion is self-salvation through principles (modern or traditional) while the gospel is salvation through entering a story--the myth that became fact--Jesus' redemptive life. The result of religion is moralism and oppression; the result of relativism is selfish individualism--both are unacceptable.
- Evangelism: (a) 1st, 'more evangelized' searchers will come right in to all services, groups and ministries. There must be participation before transformation. (b) 2nd, 'less' evangelized people are now reached through non-condescending cultural and social involvement. Do friendship (not even friendship evangelism--gospel character produces friendship *about* them). Evangelism is more about how we live with a new **quality** of life: we show how the gospel helps us embrace the excluded, be a servant of common good. live with integrity regarding sex, money, power. (c) 3rd, evangelism has more to do with excellence and thoughtfulness in the way we do our work.
- Music/worship cannot be confined to the classical or the contemporary. High quality aesthetics are critical in our technological yet anti-rational age.
- The preferable ministry area is again the parish--the neighborhood. Stress racial reconciliation and multi-cultural community. This has always been Biblical, but now it's practical. Society is becoming more multi-ethnic and concerned with building bridges.
- Stress lay leadership--all deeply based on friendship (very organic) rather than program (inorganic). Skepticism about expertise will encourage lay leadership.
- Communication style must have the 'irony' of gospel-humility rather than the typical pomposity of traditional Christianity or slick-cool-controlled nature of modern Christianity. But challenge is to avoid the 'irony' of cynicism. Cynical-irony is seeing other's sin as worse than yours (a plank vs. your splinter) while humble-irony is seeing your sin as worse than others' (a splinter vs. your plank).

\* Illustration of blind beggars & the elephant - the only way to hold that is if you can see the whole elephant. Also, to deny the diff. in religions is to oppress them, not to be ourselves. something we would not do e.g. to diff. races, etc.



## APPLYING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 8 -

## TO WHOM? THE GOSPEL FOR 'MIXED' POST-MODERN AUDIENCES

### A. TWO ALTERNATIVE WORLD-VIEWS, 'Modern' and 'Post-modern':

1. Concept of world-views: Everyone has some sort of **working** philosophy of life which underlies life choices and behavior. A "worldview" consists of answers to several basic questions: 1) "where did the world come from?" 2) "how do we know things, especially right and wrong?" 3) "what is wrong with the world?" 4) "what is life **really all** about, what should we aim for?" There are two very broad ways of characterizing world-views that are alternatives to Christianity. "Secular" world-view is basically the modern, western, individualistic world-view that has come out of the Enlightenment. "Traditional" world-view includes all those which emphasize loyalty to family, abiding virtues, ancient wisdom. This would include everything from Hinduism and Islam and Greco-Roman dualism to much of what passes for Christianity.

1. <i>Source:</i>	Secular No creator	Traditional God creator	Christian God creator
2. <i>Ethics:</i>	No right and wrong/ create own	Eternal law	Eternal law
3. <i>Problem of life</i>	Oppression: People not allowed to live their own lives	Sins People not living lives as they should	Sin Peop living lives as their own <b>Savior/Lord</b>
4. <i>Meaning of life</i>	Freedom; Self-discovery	Good works/ duty; self-denial	Grace

2. A spiritual divide: The basic difference between people I meet today has to do with how and why they will see they **need** the gospel. People from traditional cultures and **mindsets** tend to a) have a belief in God, and b) have a strong sense of moral absolutes and the obligation to be 'good'. This may be a sense of obligation to their family, their people, a general **moral** ethic, a tradition, a religion (including Christianity), and so on. These folk respond well to a presentation that says, "**Sin keeps you from ever being as good as you need to be**, and it therefore separates you from God." People with more secular and 'post-modern' **mindsets** tend to a) have only a vague belief in the divine if at all and, b) have little sense of moral absolutes. Therefore, they feel the obligation to be free and true to their own selves and dreams. These folk respond well to a presentation that says, "**Sin keeps you from being free as you need to be**, and therefore it enslaves and de-humanizes you."

a. 'The Gospel as Forgiveness'. The way to show the traditional persons their need for the gospel is by saying, 'your sin makes you imperfect! You can't be righteous enough. You may think you are looking to God for salvation, but you are really **trying** to save yourself.' (Imperfection is the biggest nightmare of the 'duty-worshipper'. We say "you are not living up!" so they are threatened.) This approach creates anxiety and relieves it by showing how Christ forgives us, covers our sins, gives us a righteous record.

b. 'The Gospel as Freedom'. But

the way to show more deeply secularized persons their need for the gospel is by saying, "your sin makes you a slave! You are actually being religious, though you don't know it--trying to be righteous in a destructive way". (Slavery is the biggest nightmare of the "choice--worshipper". We say, "you are not really in control" so they are threatened.) This approach creates anxiety and relieves it by showing how Christ redeems us (lit. "ransoms us from slavery"), liberates us.

Each approach is Biblical, of course. Romans tends to give the **first** approach (though see Romans 6-8). Galatians tends to give the second approach. Paul insists that his pagan converts, if they go with the "Judaizers", will only be going back into bondage. Paul equates religious moralism and pagan hedonism as being essentially the same thing. Each of the two approaches assumes a piece of common grace, a certain insight about truth. The older cultures saw duty as the key of salvation. The gospel says: 'but you **AREN'T** living up to your duty unless you come to God through the finished work of X.' The newer culture sees freedom as the key of salvation. The gospel says: 'but your **AREN'T** free unless you come to God through finished work of X.' Now in both situations, we must be careful. The first approach to the gospel must be careful not to let the hearers think that the gospel is just a way to get a free pardon. The second approach to the gospel must be careful not to let the hearers think that the gospel is just a way to get personal fulfillment. In former times, when churches were so **filled** with people who were traditional, we had to avoid preaching any 'salvation through duty'. (We failed to avoid it, in fact.) Now churches are so filled with people who are therapized to seek fulfillment, we must avoid preaching any 'salvation through discovery'. (We are failing to avoid it, in fact.)

**3. Who are the two kinds of people?** Every person must be considered on a case by case basis. But here are some ideas for who these two kinds of people tend to be, at least in the U.S. The first set of people (more traditional worlds-view) tend to include: people who are older, who are from strong Catholic or religious Jewish backgrounds, who are from conservative evangelical/Pentecostal Protestant backgrounds, people from the southern U.S., and first generation immigrants from non-European countries. The second set of people tend to include: people who are younger, who are from **nominal/weak** Catholic or non-religious Jewish backgrounds, who are from liberal mainline Protestant backgrounds, people from the **western** and northeastern U.S., Europeans (herein the states), and the children of families from **non-Western** countries.

In most non-Western (non U.S-European), the traditional world-view is more prevalent in less urban areas and less educated classes, while the secular world-view is more prevalent in more urban areas and more educated classes.

We must also notice that this division also runs along a divide between older secularists and newer secularists in the West. The older secularism has been called 'modem' and the newer "post-modem". In the earlier part of the century, modem secular people **still** had a high belief in reason and were very moral. But as the century has waned, "post-modem" secularists are far more relativistic and are skeptical of objective reality of any kind, whether empirical or moral. Therefore, very moral yet secular parents have produced very a-moral, secular children.

Summary. In general, I want to show that it is best to communicate in the second mode. "The Gospel as Freedom" because the second mode critiques (as we see in Galatians) **both** ways of rejecting the gospel--both **moralism/traditionalism** and **relativism/hedonism**, while the **first** approach only critiques moralism.

## B. A GOSPEL FOR THE MORE SECULAR (The Gospel as Freedom)

Note: The following continues to contrast the gospel with both religions and irreligion. The heart of the gospel is propitiation. You can lose the gospel either through the religiosity of Phariseism or the irreligiosity of Sadduceeism. (Sadducees don't live as if there is a God of wrath, but Pharisees don't live as if there is a God whose wrath has been fully satisfied through Christ.)

### THREE WAYS OF LIFE.

1. Irreligion is avoiding God as Lord and Savior by ignoring him. 2. Religion is avoiding God as Lord and Savior by developing a moral righteousness and **giving** it to God so that then he owes you. **3. Christianity** But the gospel is not that we develop a righteousness and give it to Him, so that then he owes us, but that he developed a righteousness through Jesus Christ and gives it to us, so that then we owe him.

### "THE CENTER"

1. Everyone has a "Center". Everyone has to live for something--something that we **think** will give us a sense of significance and satisfaction. We **all** then have a "personal center"--a bottom line, an ultimate value by which we sort through **all** the activities of life and set priorities. It may be career, possessions, appearance, romance, peer groups, achievement, good causes, moral character, religion, marriage, children, friendships--or a combination of a several. Without this 'bottom line', our life would be completely meaningless. This means, however...

2. Everyone is a Slave. Whatever we live for has control over us. We do not control ourselves. Internally, they create instability. The things we live for enslave us with guilt (if we fail to attain them) or anger (if someone blocks them from us) or fear (if they are threatened) or drivenness (since we must have them) or despair (if we ever lose them completely). We become emotionally dependent on them. Externally, they lead us to relationally exclude. If we are desperately **trying** to get our identity out being a member of our class or party or people or culture, we tend to 'demonize' the 'other'. This means, then...

- a. Even the most irreligious people are really worshipping something. Whatever thing or things from which we choose to derive our value become the ultimate meaning in our lives--thus it serves as a 'god' and gives us a sense of worth or 'righteousness' even if we don't think in those terms. Something is "Lord of our lives". People who want to be popular are controlled by approval. People who want power are controlled by money and politics. But we do not control ourselves.
- b. Even the most religious people are not really worshipping God. Religious people may look to God as Helper, Teacher, and Example, but it is their moral performance which is serving as their Savior. They are just as guilty and self-hating if they fail it, just as angry and resentful if someone blocks it, just as fearful and anxious if something threatens it, just as driven 'to be good'.

Sum: So both religious and irreligious people are avoiding God as Savior and Lord--but in different ways. Both are seeking to keep control of their own lives by looking to something besides God as their salvation.

Transition: We have to live for something, and something will control us. What will we do then? We must first of all see there is a Creator. Nothing better explains the brokenness we see. Even the best things don't 'fill the void' in our hearts. We were made for something infinite and eternal. Only God is big enough to fill up the greatness of what we need. But second we must see that we've tried to be our own Creator. If there is a real Creator to which we owe everything, then what we've done is serious. Deep inside of us we know he's there, but we've conveniently used **all** the religious hypocrites in the world to avoid **coming** to grips **with** him. There is only one Master, however, who can forgive (none of the rest ever will), and who is last (none of the rest ever can). Neither failure on our part nor the circumstances of life can separate us from Him. Thus only in **service** to Him will we find freedom.

To find Him now we must admit:

3. Everyone needs a Substitute. Only when we accept that Jesus came and lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died in **our** place and rely on him for our relationship with God and with ourselves and with others--are we set free from false **kings**. To transfer from false **kings** into the **kingdom** of Christ we must **first admit** the problem: that you have been substituting yourself for God either by religion (**trying** to be your own savior by obedience to moral standards) or by irreligion (**trying** to be your own lord by disobedience to moral standards). And second to accept the remedy: asking God to accept you for Jesus' sake and know that you are loved and accepted because of his record. not yours.

### C. HELPING THE MORE SECULAR "CLOSE WITH CHRIST"

#### 1. Change not the amount but the depth of your repentance.

You have to "repent", but the repentance that receives Christ is not so much being **sorry** for specific sins. It is not less than that, but it is much more. Saving repentance is admitting that your **main** sin is your efforts of self-salvation, at **trying** to be your own Savior. Don't just repent of sins, but of the self-righteousness under all you do, bad **and** good. Repent not just for doing wrong, but even for the **reason** you did right--not just for law-breaking but for law-relying. Admit that the reason you did right was so you could put God in your debt. to have some say in what kind of life you deserve, to keep control of your life.

2. Change not the amount, but the object of your faith. You have to "believe", but the belief that receives Christ is not so much subscribing to a set of doctrines about Christ. It is not less than that. but it is much more. Saving faith is transferring your trust from your own works and record to Christ's work and record. We are not liberated by the teaching of Christ, but by the work of Christ for us. The gospel is not our developing a righteous record and giving it to God, but that God in Christ developed a righteous record and gives it to us. The only way to be accepted by God is by asking God to accept you for Jesus' sake--then you can know that you are loved and accepted because of his record, not yours. Then the determining factor in your relationship with God is not your past but Christ's past.

Pray: "Lord, I have been trying to be my own Savior and Lord, both in my bad deeds and in my good. If I have never done so before, I thank you for the perfect life and sacrificial death of Christ in my place. Now I ask you to receive and adopt me as your child, not because of anything I have done, but because of what Christ has done for me."

### D. HELPING THE MORE SECULAR FORESEE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

This new life of freedom extends through

1. Continual joyful repentance for residual self-righteousness. A new quality of life results as you learn to joyfully repent for "idols", left-over systems of self-salvation. Under every problem there is something more important than Jesus that is operating as our functional righteousness and worth.

Here is a real example. A woman in her late 30's had never married. Her family and her part of the country believed that there was something radically wrong **with** any woman of that age that was still single. She wrestled greatly with shame and guilt, and she went to a counselor. The therapist rightly told her that she had taken her to heart her family's approach to personal value and worth. They taught that a woman's "record" had to include a husband and children if she was to have any value or worth. The counselor then proposed that she throw off such an unenlightened view and throw herself into a career. About this time she was going to a church where she was clearly hearing the gospel for the **first** time. She realized that the well-meaning counselor was asking her to throw off a politically incorrect system of works-righteousness for

a politically correct one! She said. "why should I leave the ranks of the many women who make 'family' their righteousness to join the ranks of the many men who make 'career' their righteousness? Would I not be as devastated then by career setbacks as I have been by romantic ones? No. I will receive the righteousness of Christ, and learn to rejoice in it. Then I can look at males or career and say, 'what makes me beautiful to God is Jesus. not these things.' Only then will I have power and freedom." She found the self-righteousness that is under every problem.

**2. *Growing experience of grateful love.*** A new quality of life results as you lose the old motivation of selfish fear ('slave" mentality) and become empowered by the new dynamic of grateful love ('child of God" mentality).

**a *New joyful repentance.*** Many people object to the gospel by saying, 'if I believed I was totally accepted despite my failures. then I would have no incentive to live a good life." But that means that that person's incentive was one of fear, and fear-motivation is always selfish. Before. the thing that convicted us of sin was the thing that de-assures us--the fear of rejection. "if I do these things, I will be cut off". In this situation, repentance was very unnatural, a total disruption, **and** devastating to one's fellowship with God. Now. however, the thing that convicts us is the very thing that assures us--his undying loyal love to us, "if I do these things, I displease the one who was cut off himself rather than cut me off." Repentance now becomes normal and revitalizing to one's fellowship with God.

**b. *New joy in obedience.*** Without an experience of grace. all our good deeds are essentially self-interested, impersonal. and conditional. But the gospel moves us to love and serve God for who he is in himself--there is an entirely new motivational structure for why we obey his Word. There is a new 'aesthetic joy" for God himself. In addition, now our obedience is unconditional. If we were saved by our works, then there would be a limit to what God could ask of us, but if we are saved by grace at such an infinite cost. then whatever we are asked to do is reasonable (and a deal!) Since we now have (in embryo) everything possible. guaranteed. we obey God not to get anything, but simply to please him. out of delight for who he is in himself, to give him pleasure and joy. People who give up on God were in it for something besides God. which did not come forth. But the gospel removes any possible motivation for disobeying God. We are not our own (I Cor.6:19-20). To the degree the gospel energizes us, to that degree our obedience will **be** joyous **and** limitless regardless of any circumstances.

## E. HELPING THE **MORE** SECULAR UNDERSTAND THE CHURCH.

The following outline is designed to help more secular people understand not just the gospel but what the church itself is about.

### WHAT IS REDEEMER **ALL** ABOUT?

**Redeemer Presbyterian Church is a center-city community of changed people who are committed to serving and renewing New York City through a movement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

The following list of our 'values' explains the key words in our purpose statement above:

#### **THE GOSPEL RENEWS THE HEART**

1. **The Gospel'** - The 'gospel' is the good news that through Christ the *power* of God's kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. When we believe **and** rely on Jesus' work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship to God. that kingdom power comes upon us **and begins** to work through us.

2. 'Changed People' - The gospel changes people from the inside out. Christ gives us a radically new identity, freeing us from both self-righteousness and self-condemnation. He liberates us to accept people we once excluded, and to break the bondage of things (even good things) that once we were driven by. In particular, the gospel makes us welcoming and respectful toward those who do not share our beliefs.

#### THE GOSPEL RENEWS THE CHURCH

3. 'Community' - The gospel creates a new community which not only nurtures individuals but serves as a sign of God's coming kingdom. Here we see classes of people loving one another who could not have gotten along without the healing power of the gospel. Here we see sex, money, and power used in unique non-destructive and life-giving ways.
4. 'Movement Mindset' - We have no illusions that our single church or our Presbyterian tradition is sufficient to renew all of New York City spiritually, socially, and culturally. We are therefore committed to planting (and helping others plant) hundreds of new churches, while at the same time working for a renewal of gospel vitality in all the congregations of the city.

#### THE GOSPEL RENEWS THE CITY

5. 'The City' - We are committed to the city and believe that nothing promotes its peace and health like the spread of faith in the gospel. Nothing moves people to humbly serve, live with, and love all the diversity of the city like the gospel does. Therefore, the gospel renews both individuals and reweaves the fabric of whole neighborhoods.
6. 'Serving' - Though we joyfully invite every person to faith in Jesus, we are committed to sacrificially serving our neighbors whether they believe as we do or not. We do this by using our gifts and resources for the needs of others, especially the poor. And more than merely meeting individual needs, we work for justice for the powerless.
7. 'Renewing' - We believe that the gospel has a deep, vital, and healthy impact on the arts, business, government, media, and academy of any society. Therefore we are highly committed to support Christians' engagement with culture, helping them work with excellence, distinctiveness, and accountability in their professions.

#### F. THE NEED TO INCLUDE NON-CHRISTIANS IN SERVICES.

##### *1. The either/or premise of evangelism and spiritual formation.*

There is a premise in much modern church-growth literature to the effect that you can't minister to Christians and non-Christians effectively in the same service. If this is the case, then a church has to either settle for being an outward facing, aggressively evangelistic church **or** an heavy discipling, teaching church. The evangelistic churches stress messages in their services that appeal to non-Christians but bore the Christians. The teaching churches stress the messages in their services that appeal to Christians but confuse, bore, or offend non-Christians. Some churches using the Willow model often try to do no spiritual formation (preaching to Christians) in the same services where they evangelize non-Christians. But this approach continues to have a pretty severe follow-up problem. Many seekers stay in the seeker services long term, never getting fed stronger meat. (And since the majority of attenders at the seeker services are usually Christians, the believers get stuck in elementary Christianity as well.)

But it is impossible to combine Christians and non-Christians in a major way unless the preacher and leaders understand that the gospel is not just the way people are justified, but also the way they are sanctified. The typical approach to the gospel is to see it is the 'A-B-C's'

part of Christian doctrine only, the minimum truth required to be saved. Then it is understood that we make progress in the Christian life through the application of other (more advanced) Biblical principles. If that is the case, then of course we cannot do both evangelism and spiritual formation at the same time. However, the Reformers, especially Luther, understood that the gospel is not only the way we are saved, but it is always the solution to every problem and the way to advance at every stage in the Christian life. (This is why the first of his 95 Theses were that **"all** of life is repentance.")

A simple **example**. If you are preaching a **sermon** on the subject of honesty, and you use the gospel on the **Christians** (see above) you are doing something that both interests and profits non-Christians. When you always solve Christian's problems with the gospel, then **non-Christians** a) get to hear it every week in multiple perspectives, and b) get to see how it really works in the Christian life. Both of these are extremely important for post-modern non-Christians.

## *2. Post-modern non-Christians need to be integrated.*

We live in an increasingly 'post-modern' society. The older modern society rejected revelation as a source of **truth**, but still honored **reason/science** as a source of truth. "Post-moderns" are more deeply secular and skeptical of any kind of truth at all. I propose that the old "modern" times were more amenable to the segregation of Christians and non-Christians, but our current situation would be better addressed by having a 'mixed' audience in the services.

In a "mixed" group, when the preacher speaks somewhat more to non-Christians, the Christians present learn how to share the faith. This is extremely important today. It is becoming increasingly difficult for Christians to just share the gospel without doing apologetics. The old canned quickie training programs cannot prepare a Christian for dealing **with** the range of intellectual and personal difficulties people have **with** the Christian faith. They need to hear the preacher week in and week out dealing winsomely and intelligently with the problems of non-believers. This excellent "training". On the other hand, when the preacher speaks more to Christians, the non-Christians present come to see how Christianity 'works'. More deeply secular 'po-mo' non-Christians tend to decide on the faith on more pragmatic grounds. They do not examine in a detached intellectual way. They also are much more likely to make their commitment through a long process of mini-decisions. They will want to try Christianity on, see how it **fits** their problems and how it fleshes out in real life.

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The process that **must** be allowed is:

- A. Awareness. **"This is it."** **Clearing** the ground of stereotypes. Distinguishing the gospel from legalism or liberalism. Distinguishing core from peripheral.
- B. Relevance. I need it." Showing the **slavery** of both religion and irreligion. **Showing** the transforming power. how the gospel 'works'".

C. Credibility. "I need it because it's true." Reversing the modern view that it-is-true-if-I-need-it. Must see the reasonableness or no endurance later.

D. Trial. "I see what it would be like." In group life, in service ministries, they try Christianity on, often talking like Christians or defending it.

E. Commitment. "I take it." Sometimes this is the point of real conversion. Sometimes it happened before, sometimes it happens later.

F. Reinforcement. "Now I get it." Typically, a period of follow up is the place where the penny drops and the gospel gets clear. Shorter if trial longer.

## G. "Centered-Sets" and "Bounded-Sets" in Churches

### 1. FORM- Creating 'missional' communities with preaching.

I am taking 'missional' from the Gospel and Our Culture Network books, especially *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, edited by Darrell L. Guder (Eerdmans, 1998). Essentially, the burden of the book is that, with the end of 'Christendom' in the West, every church in North America must consider itself now 'on the mission field'. Evangelism and mission can no longer be considered a department of the church nor something done by the church somewhere else. Now every aspect of the church--its worship, teaching, service--must be 'missional'. Though the seeker-sensitive church movement was a sincere effort to do this, it 'sold out' to modernity in different ways than did the old liberal mainline religion.<sup>39</sup> How, then, can we move ahead to a new 'missional' church? One key to this is the 'bounded' and 'centered' set concept.

a. Bounded and Centered Sets In mathematics, there are two different ways to define a 'set'. One is a 'bounded set'. A point is in the set if it is related properly to (i.e. if it is inside) the boundary. Another is the 'centered set'. A point is in the set if it is related properly to (i.e. if it is in alignment with or moving toward) the center of the set. Organizations that are 'bounded sets' put great emphasis on the lines of demarcation 'around the circle'--at all points. 1) A person cannot work with or be part of the organization in any meaningful sense without the rite of initiation and the adoption of extensive standards which set the person apart. 2) Differences between members and the outside world are emphasized. 3) Membership is defined in terms of common beliefs and policies and folkways that are pretty extensive. Organizations that are centered-sets put more emphasis on **central** goals and commitments. 1) A person can work with the organization as long as it shares basic goals and is **willing** to work for them. 2)

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<sup>39</sup> The 'Gospel and Our Culture' network has been inspired by the writings of Leslie Newbiggin. Its writings are generally edited by Craig Van Gelder of Calvin Seminary, George R. Hunsberger of Western Seminary, and Darrell L. Guder of Columbia Seminary (Decatur, Ga). Besides its patron saint Newbiggin, the movement draws heavily from Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, Douglas John Hall. By and large, this is a group with more mainline **sensibilities** who are in reaction to **both** the old mainline **liberalism and** the church **growth/'seeker** sensitive church' movement. They consider the former to have been a sell-out to the **Enlightenment** and now proven to be impotent and bankrupt. On the other hand, they also consider that the evangelical church **growth/Willow** Creek movement is an over-adaptation to modernity. They see it as sold out to technique, consumerism, individualism, and its allergy to historical rootedness. Thus both becoming obsolete. (See Session **12-B**) Unlike other critics of church growth, however, they do not simply call people to return to traditional ministry models that were appropriate for 'Christendom'--a church culture. Instead, they **call** for new ways of conceiving and doing church **as** being on a mission field--'missional church'. Reformed evangelicals should **learn** a lot from these writings. They do rely on a much more redemptive-historical understanding of the Bible and of the kingdom. **However**, they conceive of the kingdom as evangelism-plus-social justice and seem to ignore (or disagree with) the concept of cultural transformation.



Differences between members and the outside world are not emphasized. 3) Membership is defined in terms of active participation toward common tasks and goals.

Traditional churches were 'bounded sets'. It used to be very clear what it meant to what belonging to a church meant. You could move nearly any place in the country and the churches of the same denomination would be highly similar. because denominations were bounded sets. However, in today's pluralistic and highly individualistic society, this bounded-set mentality is greatly resisted and hard to maintain. Liberal, mainline churches have almost completely abandoned membership standards and firm boundaries of any kind.

Many **traditional** and conservative evangelical churches, however, still are extremely 'bounded set' in their **mentality**. One of the main ways this expresses itself is in the way bounded-set churches use 'jargon'--almost a tribal dialect. On the one hand, it is the almost casual use of pieties such as, 'it was a blessing' and 'praise the Lord for that' and 'we just ask for traveling mercies **now**'. The outsider immediately realizes that he or she could not pray or talk **outloud** without revealing that they are outsiders. It would take months to **learn** the dialect. On the other hand, the bounded-set mentality is expressed when doctrinal distinctives (baptism, charismatic gifts-views, approaches to tithing, **eschatology**) are stressed and expounded in Sunday services. This

#### b. Creating Centered-Set Worship with Christo-centric preaching

1. No jargon. Never talk like its just us chickens here. No sub-cultural dialect.
2. Continual concerns
3. Critique irreligion **and** religion.
4. Deal idols, not just behavior.
5. Stress outsidemess of grace.
6. Artistic excellence.
7. Address all directly.
8. Credibility by reference to and appeal to their authorities.
9. Stress common grace overlap with their culture values.
10. Use the gospel to solve Christian's problems—they overhear.
11. Celebrate deeds of mercy and common citizenship in the community.
12. Historic rootedness with contemporary forms.

## 2. CONTENT-

a. Preaching that aims at '**unbelief**' is consistently evangelistic yet edifying. Normal preaching should **be** evangelistic preaching. Ordinarily, '**edificational**' preaching is more oriented to behavior ("**you** must obey Christ in this way and this way") while 'evangelistic' preaching is usually oriented toward belief (you must believe in Christ in this way and this **way**"). But this misses the unity of the human soul. Edwards in the *Affections* argues persuasively that, **essentially**, if truly believe, it changes behavior, and if you are not behaving properly, it is because of unbelief." A person may say, I know God cares for me, but I am still petrified **with** fear." No. **If** they are running in fear, it is because they don't 'know' God's care.

Therefore, any failure in behavior in Christians is due to unbelief. The antidote to unbelief is a fresh telling of **the** gospel. **So**, if a sermon is **Christ-centered** in its exposition and application, and if it is oriented toward a) **dismantling** the unbelief systems of the human heart, and toward b) **re-explaining** and using the gospel on the **unbelief--then** it will be highly illuminating to **non-Christians** even when it is aimed primarily to Christians. Preaching that cannot both edify and evangelize at once is **choosing** behavior over belief or belief over behavior.

b. Preaching that has the following characteristics is 'spiritually inclusive'.

It must, generally avoid sentimentality, sentimental popular culture. (There are good theological reasons as well, but generally the new elites disdain the sentimental.)

It must be a highly intelligent ministry that appeals to reason as well as the heart. (New elite culture is not highly emotional, and in particular distrusts religion based on great emotion. It is an "expert culture" and therefore expects teachers/speakers to be highly educated as well. Also, see below.)

It must be far more oriented to the sensibilities and interests of secular and neo-pagan culture. (The older model did engage high culture, not avante garde culture.)

(1) In the arts and music, it must use a great variety of forms (classical, jazz, gospel, folk, alternative) while still being careful about mediocre quality or sentimental pop culture offering.

(2) In the ministries and the preaching, it must show a complete mastery of and respect for the common objections and problems the new elites have with religion. It must answer questions the world is asking.

It must more multi-ethnic. (We must mirror the diversity of the new class in our leadership and staff). But related notes:

The "culture" of the church (music, etc.) has to mirror the culture of the new class, not of the culture and music (forexample) of the traditional home cultures. New class culture tends to be a "pastiche" of classical, modern, and folk cultures. For example, if an Anglo person is extremely wedded to high culture classical music or a Black person to emotive gospel music--both would probably be somewhat unhappy with the church's offerings.

It must be much less legalistic. (Members of the new class who have any church background are usually highly alienated by what they perceive to be legalism and moralism in the congregations they knew. A lack of legalism is not only important for reaching secular people, but also for **making** a church multi-ethnic.

It must be much more oriented to helping Christians in vocations. (The new class does not just have jobs--they live "in their jobs". When such people come to Christ, they want to know how to be distinctively Christian in the way they go about their profession. The new ODF must be very attractive and **skillful** in calling and training people into these ministries in the public sectors.)

It must be heart not just head-oriented. (The new elites are not as **rationalistic** as the older elites. The ODF churches that maintain a highly academic, heavily rational teaching ministry, without orientation to "felt needs", is simply not making a transition to a post-modern age that puts such a premium on experience. In other words, while the new elites are less emotionalistic than their ethnic, traditional culture, they are less rationalistic than the older Anglo elite culture.)

### c. Importance of Process

People become Christians through dozens of "mini-decisions".

#### 1. Awareness decisions:

She's OK: she's very cheerful and accepting.

She's religious, but surprisingly open-minded.

You **can** be a Christian and be intelligent!

The Bible isn't so hard to understand after all.

A lot of things the Bible says really fit me.

I see the difference between Christianity and just being moral.

#### 2. Relevance decisions:

There must be some advantages to being a firm Christian.

**An** awful lot of very normal people really like this church!

It would be nice if I could believe like she does, it would help.

Jesus seems to be the key: I wonder who he was.

#### 3. Credibility decisions:

I see the Bible is historically reliable.

You really can't use science to disprove the supernatural.

There really were eyewitnesses to the resurrection.  
Jesus really is God.

I see now why Jesus had to die--it is the only way.

4. Commitment decisions:

I am a sinner.

I need a Savior.

Though there are lots of costs. I really must do what He says.

I will believe in him and live for him.

d. Tone in Preaching and Worship Leading

1. Demeanor. First, if we have a sense of awe before God's glory, we shouldn't be too charming. cute or folksy. drawing attention to ourselves. Instead of folksiness, there should be a dignity and wonder. Second. if we have a sense of freedom in God's love, we won't be nervous, intimidated. self-conscious. Instead of tautness. there should be a sweetness and peace. Third, if we have a sense of humility before God's grace, we won't be pompous, authoritarian, severe, or 'ministerial.' Instead of pomposity there should be authenticity and humility.

2. Emotion. First. we should not hide or over-control our feelings behind a reserved, formal, and deadpan exterior. One sign of genuineness is that there is a full range of emotions appropriate for the subject. We should not always be happy or sad or intense or tender. Unless our feelings are deeply engaged, how can we *lead* in worship? But second, we should not let our feelings have full scope. leaving the congregation behind.<sup>40</sup> If we indulge our individual feelings, how can we *lead* in worship? Third, we should not talk overly about how we feel or about our experiences and convictions ("I believe that.."). And we should not tell others how they are supposed to feel at the moment ('Don't you just really want to...?' or 'Isn't the Lord just so good?'). Both are manipulative and 'bathetic,' working directly on the feelings instead of pointing to the Lord. Instead of hiding, discussing, or forcing feelings, we should *reveal* a full range of emotions as we lead. It should be clear to others that we have strong emotions that we are keeping in check, rather than hiding an empty heart under sentimental language or hearty gestures.

3. Language. First. language should not be too archaic. It is dangerous to seek transcendence and dignity by using antiquated language. Antiquated language can be stuffy, preachy, grandiloquent. pedantic. It is over-stated rather than simple, immediate. clear, vivid, and *direct*.<sup>41</sup> It is especially easy to lapse into such language because the King James Version of many *texts* of Scripture will come to mind as was pray and speak. Instead of saying, 'we have been unchaste in our hearts.' say 'our thoughts have been impure.' Don't pray:

"**Almighty God.** we come before you now. Because of our transgressions, we are not worthy of you. but forgive us for Christ's sake. Give us fervent hearts to worship you in a faithful and worthy manner. Let your Word be mighty in us to the pulling down of strongholds, and to the casting down of imaginations and everything that exalts itself against **the** knowledge of God."

But rather.

"**Almighty God.** gracious Father. we are not **fit** for your presence, but we look to Jesus Christ. who takes away our sin. Through him we would now come to you. listening to your voice. trusting in your love. delighting in your Word. and leaning on your arm. We

<sup>40</sup> If you let your emotions have full scope. you will draw attention to yourself. Generally, when you do let your personal emotions go too far, you (at best) have forgotten the corporate aspect of worship and are absorbed **In** your own response to God. At worst. you are showing off, doing 'spiritual bragging.'

<sup>41</sup> Instead of using archaic ('fair' instead of 'beauty') or florid language ('beauteous' instead of 'beauty'), use "Strunk-White" English. This refers to the rules of composition in the little volume *The Elements of Style* (2nd editions. MacMillan, 1972) by William Strunk and E.B.White. Rules of Composition include 'use the active voice.' 'put statements in positive form.' 'use definite. concrete language.' 'omit needless words.' 'express co-ordinate ideas in similar form.' 'keep related words together,' 'place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.' (If only I had followed these rules as I wrote this essay!)

joyfully beg to see your face! Now cleanse our minds of all error and our hearts of all idols, that we may shine in the world with your radiant light."

Second, on the other hand, language should not be too colloquial. As archaic language loses the accessibility and intimacy of worship, so colloquial language loses the transcendence. Colloquial language is casual, familiar, highly idiomatic, and sentimental, instead of stately, elegant, and 'unembroidered.' Colloquial language has little resource for expressing emotion except to use 'bathetic' words. 'Lord, you are so incredible.' "The Lord is so exciting."

An overly informal style of address would be:

Lord God, it is just so good to be here today with you. Father. Here with the family of brothers and sisters who love you. And we just ask that you would be really near to us. and help us to really lift up your Name. Lord, you are just incredible."

Third. language should be free from technical jargon. and especially evangelical sub-culture terminology. There are innumerable phrases that worship leaders fall back on because they 'sound spiritual,' but they are sentimental and un-decipherable to non-initiates. Examples are innumerable, but some illustrations follow. Overuse of 'blessing.' "Let us come unto the Lord." 'Let's just lift up the name of Jesus.' "We pray for a hedge of protection around him. Lord." Key theological terms, like 'justification' can be introduced and explained. Sub-cultural talk. however. is at best highly exclusionary, and at worst very phony, a ruse to hide a lack of actual heart engagement

e. Objections.

Often. in 'centered-set' churches, the complaint from Christians is: "I don't get the deeper, meatier sermons that I crave." Here are some responses:

1) First, by deeper and meatier, some mean--"I want more theological distinctives spelled out". In other words. at Redeemer we don't usually talk in the preaching that much about different views of baptism. charismatic gifts. and so on. We certainly touch on them when they come up in the text, but I don't spend much time on them at all.

But why should we talk about distinctives that divide denominations when so many of the people present don't believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, or the deity of Christ? "Ah." says someone. "that's what I mean--I want deeper, meatier stuff at a church where everyone is a believer and we can get beyond the basics." But is infant baptism more 'meaty' than the doctrine of the Scripture? Here's a list of **the** doctrines we hit very hard and very often in preaching: a) that Jesus is the only way to God (a defense of Christian 'exclusivism'), b) the inerrancy of Scripture, c) the reality of hell, d) the sovereignty of God over every circumstance including trouble and suffering, e) the sinfulness of any sex outside **marriage**. f) the Trinity, g) total depravity and inability. h) propitiation and penal substitution. i) imputation, j) justification by faith alone. k) sanctification by faith alone. l) last-day judgment. and the m) reality of transcendent moral absolutes. I hit each one nearly every couple of months. Now are these not 'meaty'? No, of course they are. What then is the being asked for? They are not so much asking for meaty treatments of central doctrines that **most/many** Christians tend to agree on, but rather for the distinctives that distinguish churches and denominations from each other. But in our setting filled with non-believers, that isn't terribly appropriate. So we **say--learn** the details in the classes and the small groups."

2) Second. by deeper and meatier. some mean "I want more doctrinal and ethical **details** spelled out. For example, some have said, "you don't get into divorce and remarriage. or how families **can** do family devotions or how church discipline should work. or how we should regard church officers. or what about Christian schools. or what about politics?" Or others have said, "you seldom talk about end-times or the different views of the millennium and so on." **Again.** I do speak of these things when they show up in the text. but I don't emphasize them.

This leads us to the fact that no preaching, all by itself, can be adequate for all the training necessary for mature discipleship. Every Christian will need to get eventually in to Biblical and theological details that are inappropriate for a sermon. Is it really edifying (though some Reformed preachers do it *anyway*) to give all the pro's and con's of the Biblical case for infant baptism and the case for believers-only baptism in a sermon? Surely a mature believer needs to hear that somewhere--but during a worship service? Therefore every preacher draws a line somewhere between and says--"if you want the details of Biblical knowledge you need to know to grow mature, you will have to get into classes or groups where they can be covered." This means that almost every preacher will have someone who draws the line between 'sermon' and a 'lecture' further toward the 'lecture' than the preacher does, and who therefore will say "I want more meat" and go off to the churches where the preacher draws the line further over so the sermons are more like lectures than his. Nearly always those churches have worship services that feel much more like classrooms. It is highly cognitive, and (ironically) thus very **contextualized** to a kind of northern-European cultural style. I don't think searching for 'meatiness' by drawing the **sermon/lecture** line so far toward a lecture is good for a worship service at **all**. Education is squeezing out worship.

**All** the old puritans (especially Edwards) knew better the difference between a lecture and a sermon. The **sermon** was more 'edifying'--more oriented to the affections and less oriented to detailed cognitive arguments. It is a major problem among new seminary graduates that they don't know the difference between a theology paper and a sermon. But the congregation sure does. I must confess that I used to give lectures under the title of sermons. I explained all the reasons we believed in infant baptism--but I got a lot of "MEGO" looks from people. ("My Eyes Glaze Over") They said. "this is surely something I need to work through--but today I need some food for my soul." A lot of Reformed pastors who **really** don't understand the ways of the heart very well (and just don't know people very well) make their sermons into lectures. Ironically, many preachers ignore the felt needs of others as a **way** of meeting their own felt needs. They are more personally comfortable making arguments than curing souls.

3) Third. by "deeper and meatier", some mean they want more talk about 'hot' topics. For example, though I touch on them when the text indicates. I don't emphasize abortion, homosexuality, nor do I make arguments about why women shouldn't be ordained. Sometimes I have been accused of avoiding 'offensive' topics out of a desire to be more acceptable to **non-Christians**. I have really thought this one through a lot. Here's my response.

The sermons at Redeemer regularly tackle doctrines that are very offensive to post-modern people. I gave you some examples above, but let me select out the ones we harp on a lot. **A)** that Jesus is the only way to God (a defense of Christian '**exclusivism**'), **B)** the inerrancy of Scripture, **C)** the reality of hell. **D)** the sovereignty of God over every circumstance including trouble and suffering, **E)** the sinfulness of any sex outside marriage, **F)** total depravity, **G)** propitiation and the anger of God. **H)** last-day judgment, and **I)** the reality of transcendent moral absolutes. This spring one sermon had the theme: "why you need an angry God in your **life**". I quoted Miroslav Volf, a Croatian, who said that if you don't believe in a God of justice and vengeance you will never be able to live non-violently in the world. You will retaliate and keep the cycle of blood shed going. Volf said, "anyone who thinks a non-judgmental God will lead to a non-violent lifestyle is someone who has a comfortable suburban life and has never really experienced oppression". Several non-Christians afterwards said the sermon was 'insidious' because it was **so** hard to refute.

Now this is highly offensive. But I virtually never preach a whole sermon on why homosexuality is sinful. Why not? Not because the gay-subject is offensive. (We do lots of offensive stuff.) It's just that it **is** a secondary issue, premised on the primary issues of--are there moral absolutes? **Is there a God who has the right to tell us things we don't want us to hear? Is there a Jesus Christ who was the Son of God and so we have to submit to him? Is there such a thing as**

divine revelation? I absolutely believe in preaching the whole counsel of God, but in an order that makes sense of it. If doctrine D, E, and F are completely premised on doctrines A, B, and C--you have to persuade people of ABC first. It's silly to tell someone 'abortion is a sin' if they don't understand the meaning of the word sin. It's like talking German to someone who doesn't know German and expecting a response. Therefore, we never at Redeemer avoid a subject because it is offensive, but we may postpone a subject and put it into classes or small group material which people work through after they've been brought toward Christ by the preaching.

Several years ago, a woman came to see me and said, "I've become a Christian here at Redeemer. Are you pro-life?" I said I was. She responded "Well, now that I'm a Christian I can see the pro-life viewpoint better, but if when I first came here I would have seen any pro-life literature around. I would never have stayed long enough to hear the gospel." That's the point.

So notice, there are three things people may mean when they come to Redeemer and say, "I want deeper, meatier teaching". It could be they want to move beyond core doctrines to more theological distinctives, and that is valid request--we are hamstrung a bit because we have so many non-Christians present. But I think it's a very fair trade off. There are few Reformed churches with 1,000 non-believers in church every Sunday (we are close to that now). Secondly, they may want simply more detailed Biblical teaching and exposition and less time spent appealing to the affections and life application, etc. That I feel is to turn sermons into lectures and really undermine what worship is. Thirdly, they may want to harp on certain moral 'hot issues' that are flashpoints in the culture wars. That is the most serious mistake of all. It guarantees that we will never convert the opposition, but will only further alienate them.

#### A Letter to a Preacher

Dear David:

Thanks for your respectful question about my 'example' of ministerial tone and conversational style. To answer your inquiry, let me give you more context.

The main thing to keep in mind is that Redeemer attendance on any given Sunday contains 20-35% non-Christians and unchurched people. Why is that? Because the preaching is very specifically aimed at **both** edifying Christians **and** addressing non-Christians. We often say that "the single most strategic moment in the ministry of Redeemer is when a Christian attends services and says, 'I wish my non-Christian friend could be here. This would really open their eyes.' That is the main 'engine' of Redeemer--friendship evangelism.

Another reason for the astonishing number of **non-Christians** is the dynamics of urban single life. Most of our people are single, and singles have far more close friendships and relationships **with** non-Christians than do believing families. Christian singles can get non-Christian singles to church much more easily than Christian families can get non-Christian families. (For a whole family to decide to come to church is a much more complex decision. Unless every member is at **least** not strongly opposed, it doesn't happen.) As a result, preaching that 'includes' both believers and non-believers gets an enormous response, because it is (humanly speaking) easier to get non-Christians into services here than in the family-centric suburbs.

How do we make sure to include both Christians and non-Christians in the preaching? That would take a very long answer. 1) **Part** of it is theological. You have to preach Christ-centered, **redemptive-historical** sermons. Every text must point to Christ as the ultimate meaning. 2) **Part** of it is logical. You must never exhort **point "D"** if it is based on "A, B, and C"--**without** referring to A, B, C. For example you must never assume that people believe in a **God** of justice who judges people. I preach on this **all** the time, but I always make a case for it. I never just assume that everyone believes this. Nor that everyone believes the Bible's reliability. Yes, this can be a bit tedious at times, but it keeps me honest, and Christians get to hear ways to briefly

and clearly give reasons for the hope that is within them. 3) Part of it is application. You have to literally address non-Christians AND Christians, almost doing dialogue with them. "If you are committed to Christ, you may be thinking this--but the text answers that fear." or "If you are not a Christian or not sure what you believe, then you surely must think that this is narrow-minded--but the text says this, that speaks to this very issue." 4) Finally, part of it is demeanor and tone and attitude. This is deeply affected by culture, of course. That is where conversational tone and openness is important. The young secularists of NYC are extremely sensitive to anything that smacks of 'artifice' to them. Anything that is too polished, too controlled. too canned--seems like salesmanship. It is a big deal to them.

I know a good number of preachers who can preach edifying sermons and can switch to evangelistic sermons, but I know hardly any that can speak to Christians with non-Christians in mind with every sentence. That is how you **have** to preach at Redeemer. Or the Christians stop bringing those hundreds of non-Christians. It takes a lot of time to learn how to preach this way. It took a **lot** of time for me to learn it in the first year I was here. New guys on the staff take months to learn it too. Almost no one from the outside seems to know how to do it. Even the ones who know something about #1 (Christ-centered preaching rather than moralistic preaching), they don't yet habitually do #2 or #3 or #4. They don't have the instincts.

With **all** this in mind, here's the answer to your questions:

1) Are there not others who use the conversational style?

Yes. but as you can see--this is only one aspect of the kind of preaching I am talking about. I picked this out as a specific example--but maybe it was too specific.

2) Can you not **ask** people to be tolerant?

a) First. I don't know on what basis you could ask the large number of non-Christians to be tolerant! Sure, they may be overly sensitive, but on what basis do you ask a non-Christian to just overlook things that they think are very important to them?

b) Second. the Christians are certainly going to be "tolerant" of a different kind of preaching--as long **as** it is orthodox and Biblical. But that is not the problem. Redeemer Christians listen very intently to everything in the service, thinking: "could I bring my friends here"? When they hear anything that they know would be a turn-off, they simply don't bring people. They may enjoy and even be profoundly moved by the service--but they don't bring friends. If they hear the preacher use non-inclusive gender language, or make cynical remarks about other religions, or use tones of voice that young post-modern consider **artificial**, or use a lot of insider evangelical tribal jargon without explaining it--it is not that the Christians will be 'intolerant' and refuse to come. They **will** simply not risk their friendships by bringing their friends, who they know would hate **it**-

**That** would not make much of a difference in other churches, but at Redeemer--that is the main "engine" and dynamic of our outreach and ministry. It means hundreds of people who are usually brought are not brought. When my last two executive pastors first came to NYC and began leading in worship, I got a lot of negative feedback from people saying "they sound like **politicians** or salesmen. We can't bring our friends." It was very hard to explain to them that **their** normal tone of voice, which was a **kind** of 'ministerial'. came across as very inauthentic. Both **ministers** were a bit non-plussed. Like most outsiders, **they** felt it shouldn't be a big deal--but you always feel that way when you look at a culture from the outside. The Christians, however. knew how their friends would react. So they just wouldn't bring them.

3) What happens when you go?

Though I am the main preacher, other guys on our staff have learned to do this kind of preaching and so they do not prevent friendship evangelism. Of course, some men are simply more gifted preachers than others--but I am talking about the preaching to believers and non-believers together. That can be learned. I don't know of anyone on the staff who hasn't learned it--though some execute better than others.

What we avoid totally is outside "guest" preachers. Why? When someone else besides one of Redeemer's regular preachers is preaching, we discovered that regular attenders simply didn't bring unchurched friends--even though they hadn't heard them yet. They simply didn't want to risk it. When you ask an unchurched or non-Christian friend to church you go 'out on a limb' and put the relationship a bit at risk. If they aren't sure of exactly what their friend is going to get--they won't bring them. So we stopped giving them 'unknowns'.

For example--a dear lady (named Dee) who has been with Redeemer from the beginning brought a non-Christian woman to the service. The preacher (one of our younger staff guys) made a rather simple comment about how "we all know that the world won't accept that people are lost apart from Christ, but that's just the truth. like it or not". He wasn't terribly harsh, but he was a bit cavalier. He didn't show any sympathy with people who wrestle with this, he didn't make any effort to show why Christians believe this, or how alternative views are not as tolerant as they appear, etc. etc. etc. The non-Christian woman wouldn't even speak to Dee for weeks afterwards, she was so angry. There's always a chance that a more experienced preacher would have gotten the same response. but that is the situation we deal with. Christians really put their reputations (even their careers) on the line when they do friendship evangelism in NYC. We always have them in mind.

Of course, when we bring a new guy on staff, he has to start out as an 'unknown'--but then those first weeks are at least an investment. Once the congregation gets to know a staff preacher, they can know his gifts and begin to use them in their friendship evangelism. But a 'guest' preacher does not help this process move forward at all.

Addendum: I've been told often that a key to preaching to non-believers in NYC is that the non-believer has *to be able to see you as the kind of* Christian *they* could be. Because I am naturally a skeptical and somewhat ironic person. I think many NYCers can look at me and say, "so *that's* what Christianity looks like in someone like me." There are an awful lot of very godly preachers and very good people who NYCers could admire and learn from but who might lack that quality. This means we need to raise up preachers among the kind of person who loves NYC or Europe and urban areas in those places--already. If we get people to move here who would only live here because they felt the obligation of ministry, they might lack this quality.

I hope this clarifies things. It has been very **difficult** to articulate all this to others. From the outside, people can vaguely recognize that the preaching is more 'evangelistic' at Redeemer, but they can't really understand why we seem to so 'jealously' guard the pulpit here (not that we have a pulpit!).

Tim

### **An Internet Inter-action**

Dear Friends: In the October *Monthly* Record there is an interview with Tim Keller. During that interview Keller says that when he preaches in New York he uses a conversational style and not what he calls a 'grand style' which is typical of Southern preaching and I suspect of Free Church of Scotland preaching.

What do people think about this? He says that the 'grand style' makes a preacher sound like a politician or an actor. Surely if the 'grand style' is the same as passion, urgency and sincerity



then it will be seen for what it is - an authentic call by a sincere man for people to listen to the voice of God.

Are we saying that the men ( Douglas MacMillan, Donald MacLeod, Calum Matheson, Murdo Alex MacLeod, Alasdair I., Alex MacDonald etc.) who have influenced the preaching style of most contemporary Free Church preachers are now outmoded in a post-modern age.

**Personally** I find it impossible to be wholly 'conversational' about great themes.

Is the Celtic fire to be put out?

D Meredith

Dear David and Friends:

I think that we all know there's a difference between a lecture and a sermon. Essentially, the sermon is more cognitively oriented, more designed to inform and provoke thought, and less aimed at the heart. deep conviction, divine adoration, and whole life-change.

But I'm not sure that I agree completely with those who say. "if the speaker is sincere, urgent, and passionate, the listeners will appreciate him whatever the style". This doesn't allow for cultural differences. For example, to my ears, nearly all Japanese speakers sound very "angry", even when they assure me that they are not at all. Why is it that I sense the orator to be angry when in **actuality** he is not? It's because of how I am reading him through my cultural 'filter'. He uses tones of voice I consider 'harsh'.

I think we have to at least be open to the possibility that culture can change so that younger generations may regularly mis-read tones of voice and expressions that once were clear signals to everyone. Notice the difference between the way Laurence Olivier did the St. Crispian Day speech in his Henry V movie (1945) and the way Kenneth Branagh did it in his movie (1989). The change is remarkable. Both are quite passionate! Branagh in no way is speaking in a '**mater**' or 'chummy' way, but Branagh is considerably more accessible and less "stylized" than **Olivier**. His expressions are much closer to what a normal, excited, passionate person would really talk like.

I dislike a "**chummy**" style of preaching. What I mean by 'conversational style' is not 'light and airy' but 'normal'. If you hear a father and mother getting urgent and passionate with their children, they certainly signal it with face and spirit and volume, but they don't go in to a 'sing song', stylized intonation.

I think the **main** thing **we** should be after is 'a sense of **God**' in preaching. People should sense the **anointing**. It is quite normal for people to weep during our services. It sometimes happens that I **weep**, though not very often. But this still all occurs without adopting the traditional 'ministerial' voice and tone.

I don't presume to know the Scottish scene well enough to give you in the Free Church advice about preaching. I certainly do not mean to show any disrespect for the Celtic tradition! I was honored to be interviewed in the Monthly Record and I just offer what I've learned there so that Free Church leaders can use what is applicable and revise or discard the rest.

**Tim Keller**



## ADORING CHRIST

### CHAPTER 9 -

## WHY? THE SENSE OF THE HEART

### WHAT? THE PURSUIT OF SPIRITUAL REALITY.

#### 1. Text. Context, Sub-Text.

##### Sub-text messages

One of the ways to understand the **tri-perspectival** model is to be clear about the text, context, and **sub-text**. 1) To be clear about the text--know what it teaches about Christ. 2) To be clear about the context--know how to appropriately present and apply it to the particular people and culture to which you speak. 3) To be clear about the 'sub-text'--know what your **real** communication message is. The **sub-text** is the message under the message.

What is a 'sub-text'? This is the real, intended meaning of a message which is more than the surface vehicles of language. For example, the statement "No. I'm just fine" may have the **sub-text** or meaning "I have no concerns. please proceed with what you are doing" but it may also mean "I have a concern but I don't want to have to say it directly". The tone of voice will have a lot to indicate the sub-text. A **sub-text** is the true meaning of a communication, whatever the text appears to be on the surface. The communicator's real goal will be evident to the audience, and that goal can "hijack" the communication towards itself regardless of what the communicator **orally says** his goal to be.

The following **sub-texts** are not the only ones, but they are typical.

#### a. A **sub-text** of reinforcement.

One kind of **sub-text** is 'aren't we great?' This is 'ritual' and "stylized" communication which is used to reinforce boundaries and contribute to a sense of security and belongingness. First, it is 'ritual' in that its main goal is to furnish a sense of reinforcement to a group. When ritual is the **sub-text** of preaching, the real message is: 'we are gathered here with people of like mind to share **this** presentation with each other as a symbol of our common commitment to each other. God, and this **organization**'.<sup>42</sup> Even though the stated goal is to present teaching on a particular text, the real purpose is to say: 'we are the kind of people who believe these **kinds** of things and live in this kind of way.' The problem here is that it is a good goal to give a community a sense of identity and belonging. But if it becomes the main goal, the real **sub-text**, it **will** destroy the sermon's ability to change lives.

Second, this is 'stylized' in that **real** information transfer is not asked for or offered. The most common **example** of 'stylized' communication in our culture is the interchange, 'how are you?' and 'I'm fine'. Ordinarily that is not meant to be a real exchange of information. Rather, the **sub-text** is 'I'm friendly to you and you are friendly to me'. When a doctor asks the same question in a hospital, however, it is not stylized--real information is requested and given. If, in a greeting situation, the receptor gives a long inventory of physical condition, he has usually **misunderstood the** sender!

Many churches **are** committed to a reinforcement **sub-text**, I'll call gate-keeping. These churches do **not** want to be challenged or convicted or 'stretched'. The focus of such communication is completely on insiders. The motive is completely to build up insiders. The goal is to strengthen and reinforce the 'bounded set'. The skills needed: are only '**tribal** dialects'.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Kraft, Communication Theory for Christian Witness (Abingdon, 1983) p. 78.

b. A sub-text of performance.

A second kind of sub-text is "am I not great?" This does not have a "reinforcement\* goal, but rather a "performance" goal. The speaker is seeking to exhibit his or her skills and promote the products of the church. The sub-text is: "don't you think I'm a great preacher, and don't you think this is a great church? don't you want to come back. bring friends, and give money?" The performance goal is: 'look at me: listen to me. see how worthy I am of your respect'. The problem here is that every communicator does need to establish credibility with an audience. but if it becomes the main goal, it destroys the sermon's ability to change lives. At some level, the audience will realize that the speaker is not really concerned about them. He or she is concerned with delivering the message well.

This sub-text does however, rely on real teaching and information transmission. The goal is to get across a body of information that the hearers do not have. However, the reason for the teaching is mainly to win people over to the organization or the church as an institution.

Many churches are committed to this performance sub-text I'll call selling. The focus of such communication is more for the benefit of newcomers and outsiders. The motive is still, basically, for the benefit of the insiders. to grow their church. The goal is to impress and create a centered set--centered on the communicator. The skills needed: are rhetorical skills. The communicator needs far more skills for arousing and keeping interest than in the first kind of communication.

c. A sub-text of training.

A third kind of sub-text is 'isn't this truth great?' Unlike in traditional cultures (which heavily used the first sub-text), this is the sub-text most used in American society. The goal is to increase the knowledge of the receiver. so that they can live in a desired way. The sub-text is: 'news you can use'. Unlike the first sub-text. but like the second. this relies heavily on real information transfer. But the aim is less 'selfish'.

Many churches are committed to the training sub-text. I'll call teaching. These churches want to be shown new things they have not seen before. They would like to be 'inspired', but they consider that less central. They want to be fed 'solid food'. The focus of such communication is still completely on insiders. (Non-Christians can't be changed until they believe.) The motive is completely to build up insiders. The goal is to strengthen and reinforce the 'bounded set'. though it will often grow the church by attracting insiders from other churches. The skills needed: are research and transmission abilities.

d. A sub-text of worship.

A last kind of sub-text is 'isn't Christ great?' This is the most complex sub-text, and it takes the most skill. It aims beyond information and even change of behavior toward the capturing of the imagination and a change in what our heart most sets its 'affections' on. The sub-text: 'don't you see how Christ is so much grander and more wonderful than you thought? Don't you see that all your problems stem from this?'

Churches should be committed to the worship sub-text. I'll call preaching. The focus is on both insiders and outsiders (since you are calling both to worship Christ rather than those things they are worshipping instead). The motive is finally to build up every one. The goal is to create both centered and bounded sets. The skills needed are many: a) rhetorical, b) research/teaching. c) contextualization.

## 2. *The Affections, Worship, and Preaching.*

The goal of the sermon is not just to make the truth *clear*, but to make the truth real. I think still the basic conservative Christian understanding of what the goal of preaching is--to "make the truth plain", to "make the truth clear". Edwards looked beyond that.

### a. "Affections"

One of Jonathan Edwards' most enduring contribution is his 'religious psychology' in *Religious Affections*. Instead of accepting the typical Western division of 'will' vs. 'emotions' (thus the division of the soul into three parts--thinking, feeling, willing). Edwards posited a division in the soul of only two faculties. The **first** was 'the understanding', which is our ability to perceive and judge the nature of things. The second he called 'the inclination of the soul' to either like or dislike, to love or reject, what we perceive. Edwards calls this inclination the 'will' when it is involved in action and "heart" when it senses the beauty of what is being perceived by the understanding. The 'Affections' are what Edwards calls the most 'vigorous and sensible exercises' of this faculty. In the Bible, they are the 'fruit of the Spirit'--love, joy, zeal, humility.

The affections are of course filled with emotion, but they are not the same as 'passions'. Affections are the action of the whole person when the inclination senses the beauty and excellency of some object. Then that object fills us with love and joy and propels us to acquire and protect it. **The** passions are also emotions, but more passing, superficial (and usually more **violent**) which can arise from a variety of fleeting causes, both mental and physical.

Edwards contribution is especially important regarding the unity of the faculties. He refused to suppose an opposition between the understanding and the affections. Gracious affections are raised up only when a person has a 'spiritual understanding' of the true nature of God. In other words, if a person says, 'I know God cares for me, but I am still paralyzed by fear'. Edwards would reply, 'then that means you really don't know that God cares for you. If you did, then the affection of confidence and hope would be rising within you.'<sup>43</sup>

### b. The 'Affections' and Preaching

Now we are in a position to see how important this is for preachers. If Edwards is right, then there is no ultimate opposition between 'head' and 'heart'. **We** must not assume, for example, if our people are materialistic, that they only need to be exhorted to give more. That would be to act directly on the will. Through guilt that may help that day's offering (!), but it will not change the people's life patterns. Nor must we simply tell stories of people's lives being changed through acts of generosity. That will simply act directly on the emotions. That will raise 'passions' and also temporarily help the offering, but it will not permanently change the people.

If **the people** are materialistic and ungenerous, it means they have not **truly** understood how Jesus, though rich, became poor for them. It means they have not **truly** understood what it means that in Christ we have **all** riches and treasures. It means their 'affections' are clinging to material things--their souls are inclined toward riches as a source of spiritual security, hope, and beauty. They may have superficial intellectual grasp of Jesus' spiritual wealth, but they do not **truly** grasp it. Thus in preaching we must re-present Christ in the particular way that he replaces the place of material things in the affections. This takes not just intellectual argument, but the presentation of the **beauty** of Christ. Edwards believed that at the root of the **heart's** affections was the search for 'excellency'--that which is appreciated and rested in for its own **sake**.<sup>44</sup> Edwards essentially defined a nominal Christian as one who finds Christ useful (to get those things the heart found 'excellent' or beautiful), while a true Christian is one who **finds** Christ beautiful for who he is in **himself**.

### c. Preaching for 'Spiritual Reality'

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<sup>43</sup> Two great places to get a short, readable explanation of Edwards on the Affections are: the 'Editor's Introduction' in J. Smith, H. Stout, K. Minkema, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (Yale, 1995), and Sam Logan's article on preaching and the affections in Samuel T. Logan, ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986). The summary in this section follows closely the Edwards *Reader*, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>44</sup> See "A Divine and Supernatural Light", pp. 111-114 and *The Mind*, pp. 22-28 in *Reader*.

This understanding profoundly affected Edwards' own preaching. In one of his sermons (on Gen. 19:14) he insists: "the reason why men no more regard warnings of future punishment, is because it don't seem real to them."<sup>45</sup> This is, essentially, the main spiritual problem and the main purpose of preaching. Though people may have a superficial understanding of a truth, God's truth is not "spiritually real" to them. If it were, their affections would be engaged and their actions accordingly changed. In the case of materialism, the security of money is more 'spiritually real' to people than the security of God's loving and wise providence. We don't live as we should not because we simply know what to do but fail to do it, but because what we think we know is not truly real to our hearts.

There are two ways that 'the prejudices of [human] nature' can be overcome in order to have divine truth become "real" to us. There are these two things in realizing a thing, or necessary in order to things seeming real to us: [1] believing the truth of it, and [2] having a sensible idea or apprehension of it."<sup>46</sup> This tells us much. Edwards saw "spiritual reality" as being more than rational conviction, but not less. We must reason and argue strenuously, but that is only the first step. Then we must move on to form 'sensible ideas'. This concept of the sensible idea was a deep pre-occupation of Edwards. It is something we know about, but it is hard to define and even harder to bring about. In perhaps his best discussion of it, Edwards says:

*"There is a twofold knowledge of good of which God has made the mind of man capable. The first, that which is merely notional... and the other is, that which consists in the sense of the heart, as when the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it. In the former is exercised merely... the understanding, in distinction from the... disposition of the soul. Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind"*<sup>47</sup>

So the purpose of preaching is to present Christ as not just true and right, but as sweet and beautiful. Preaching must aim at 'sensible ideas' of Christ.

How can it do that? I offer the following ideas tentatively.

First, Edwards believed very firmly that the reason is very engaged in sense impressions of the heart. He does not pit rationality against narrative or against emotion or against imagination as is common in post-modern times. He was thus very, very concerned to be crystal clear in dividing his subject and description and definition. He **defined** what he was saying negatively ("I don't mean this, this, or this") and positively ("I mean this, this, and this"). And he was quite diligent in arguing and **making** his case. This reasoning must be adapted to the culture and educational level of the hearers, however.

Second, Edwards believed (see his **first** entry in his notebook "The Mind") that excellency was mainly a matter of relationships. The first way toward 'sensible ideas' is therefore analogical illustrations, to show the extensive 'cross-modal' relationships involved in spiritual reality. No one was better than C.S. Lewis and Edwards himself at putting truths into concrete terms that leave appeal to one of the five senses and leave a vivid mental impression. (See **Part B- "Imagination"**). This is extremely important because Edwards believed that the 'affections' worked spiritually much like the five senses worked physically. Thus language must be a vivid

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<sup>45</sup> Wilson H. Kimnach, 'Jonathan Edwards's Pursuit of Reality' in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* ed. Nathan O. Hatch, Harry S. Stout (Oxford, 1988), p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> "A Divine and Supernatural Light" in *Reader*, p. 112.

and as sense-evocative as it must be clear and reasonable. Example: "Sin is crouching at the door" is more evocative than "sin will get you into trouble".

Third. "sensible ideas" are supported by narrative or story. This is something that Edwards seemed to know little about, and as such he was probably a man of his time. While his 'mini-illustrations' are remarkable, he does not rely at all on the importance of story. Narrative **develops** character and plot--brings crisis and resolution. Example: "In the morning, it is always **Leah**" is more evocative than 'we will always be disillusioned in this life.'

Fourth, 'sensible ideas' are supported by evoking the existing 'excellencies' or idols of the hearers lives. They already have their affections engaged in something, so describe it, tell stories of people involved in it. use illustrations from it. This will get the people's heart engaged. Then show the inadequacy of it and turn immediately to Christ, using definition, description, illustration. and narrative to in a sense 'transfer' the affections to him as their new object. Don't just illustrate **Christ** in general, but as an alternative to the common idol. Examples are numerous. 'People have let you down, but there is only one true Shepherd. Marriage has let you down. but there is only one true Bridegroom.'

Fifth, 'sensible ideas' are supported by a worshipping preacher. Maybe the most basic way to move from information to 'sensation' is by the preacher actually worshipping in the act of preaching. Are you 'sensing Christ' on the heart as you preach? In other words, what is the 'sub-text' of your message? Are you mainly concentrating on the sermon performance or the audience or on him? Put another way--are you, in a sense. meditating and contemplating him as you preach? (**See** Session 19-B.) Have you moved beyond information in the Luther-'Garland Meditation' method to adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication yourself? Are you actually praising him as you talk about his praiseworthiness? Are you actually humbling yourself as you talk of our sin? That will be very evident to the congregation. It is the **sub-text** beneath the words. A sermon must be heavy with a 'sense of God' and must make its aim to bring people to worship before the beauty of Christ. That will only happen if you often do so yourself.

#### d. **Biblical** 'remembering' and Worship

This concept of 'spiritual reality' is not just an Edwardsian innovation. The Bible itself stands as a massive testimony to his views, because it is not a series of didactic essays but an enormous diversity of stories. poetry, dramas, apocalyptic visions, and so on.

A basic **Biblical** concept is the (sinful) tendency to "**forget**" the Lord and the need to "**remember**". This is not usually a matter of intellect and information. The problem is that the information **we** have **almost** automatically becomes 'unreal' to us without continual covenant renewal ceremonies. 2 Peter 1:8-9 indicates that spiritual growth is mainly a matter of overcoming the tendency to 'spiritually forget'.

**In Joshua 4:21-24, God tells** the children of Israel to take 12 stones from the place where he dried up the Jordan in order to make a pillar of remembrance. It would seem ridiculous to imagine **that** the people could forget such a remarkable miracle. But this is testimony to the fact that sin makes us 'forget'. The main difference between a Christian and a nominal believer is that the **truth has** become 'spiritually real' to the heart of the Christian. The main difference between a growing Christian and a stagnant Christian is the truth is 'refreshed' regularly to the growing Christian. **Nasty** things our parents **said** to us 20 years ago are still on '**video**' in our souls. but God's **promises** are only on 'audio'. Our hearts can hold on forever to the **reality** of being insulted or rejected or of being a failure, but it cannot 'remember' being assured. comforted or humbled by **God**.

This is the fundamental **problem** of living in the world. The less real is very real to us; the more real is very unreal to us. (One preacher said that the two jobs of a pastor is--a) to show those

not under the dominion of sin, who think they are, that they are really not, and b) to show those under the dominion of sin, who think they are not, that they really are.)

So what do we do? Worship.

The Lord's Supper in particular, and the worship service in general are designed to recreate 'sensible ideas'. Hebrews 3:13 says that we need at very least Christian community daily lest we be hardened by sin. All our problems with worry, temptation, guilt, and anger are due to the fact that God and his salvation is unreal to us at the moment. The purpose of worship and preaching is to give us again a *sense* of God, to **bring** us into God's presence, to make salvation real again.

The English 'worship' come from "worth-ship" and that is telling. In worship, I move from information to spiritual sensation. I see God's *worth* and I take my affections off the false things I find 'excellent' and I give *God* what he alone is *worth*. Our whole problem is that we are functionally adoring and worshipping other things. We are dotting on, obsessing on, imagining (fantasizing), spinning out scenarios about them. That is worship. If I find the disapproval of others more "real" than the disapproval of God, that is a failure of worship. What I worship (what I put my affections on, what captures my imagination) is what makes me who I am. The only way to change my fundamental personality is to change what I worship.

I worship when I treasure God, when information and imagination come together, when I find him more beautiful than anything else.

#### *Another testimony*

Dr. D.M. Lloyd-Jones, hardly a trendy type (!) in article on how Edwards effected him, makes a major critique of evangelical-expository preaching as currently taught many places. "*The first and primary object of preaching is not only to give information. It is, as Edwards says, to produce an impression. It is the impression at the time that matters, even more than what you can remember subsequently. In this respect Edwards is, in a sense, critical of what was a prominent Puritan custom and practice. The Puritan father would catechize and question the children as to what the preacher had said. Edwards, in my opinion, has the true notion of preaching. It is not primarily to impart information; and while you are writing your notes you may be missing something of the impact of the Spirit (He mentions how discouraged people taking notes preaching--'this is not a lecture' Welsh growl.) As preachers we must not forget this. We should tell our people to read certain books themselves and get the information there. The business of preaching is to make such knowledge live.*"

Jedwards Thoughts on Revival fits in: '*The frequent preaching that has lately obtained, has in a particular manner been objected against...It is objected that...so many sermons in a week is too much to remember and digest Such objections against frequent preaching. If they be not from an enmity against--religion, are for want of duly considering the way that sermons usually profit an auditory. The main benefit obtained by preaching is by impression made upon the mind at the time, and not by an effect that arises afterwards by a remembrance of what was delivered And though an after-remembrance of what was heard in a sermon is oftentimes very profitable; yet, for the most part, that remembrance is from an impression the words made on the heart at the time: and the memory profits, as it renews and increases that impression' (Thots on revival).*

Sum: If it is true that auditors are now less rational and more interested in 'encounter' and 'experience', and so on--Edwards and Lloyd Jones' advice is even more on target **than** ever before. Not just to make the truth clear, but to make the truth real. Well, but how?

HOW? THE STRATEGY OF PREACHING-- **THE** BEAUTY OF TRUTH



**Second point:** The strategy of preaching is to not just to move the feelings but to *illuminate* and fire the imagination with truth. Imagination or illustration refers to the preacher's ability to evoke mental images in the mind of the listener. When we speak the word "justification", no particular picture is evoked in the hearer's mind. But when we speak of "our advocate **pleading** his finished work before the bar of God" (which is what justification is), we have elicited an image in the mind of the audience. We are using imagination. Why consider "imagination" or "illustration" under the situational aspect? Because the art of illustration is the **art of incarnating: Biblical truths in the world in which the audience actually lives.**

### *1. Imagination in Historic Christian Preaching*

The great Puritan preacher, Richard Sibbes said, "But because the way to come to the heart is often to pass through the fancy [imagination], therefore this godly man studied by lively representations to help men's faith by the fancy. It was our Saviour Christ's manner of teaching to express heavenly things in an earthly manner..."<sup>48</sup> William Ames in The Marrow of Sacred Divinity: "As touching the matter of delivery, the Scripture doth not explaine the will of God by universall, and scientific rules, but by narration, examples, precepts, exhortations, admonitions, and promises: because that manner doth make most to affect the will, and stirre up godly notions, which is the chief scope of divinity."

These quotes reveal that the "art of imagination" was no mere embellishment for Puritan preachers, but was **central** to their philosophy of communication. The best Puritan speakers literally peppered their discourses with sparkling word pictures and metaphors. Thomas Brooks is a worthy example.

Jonathan Edwards was peerless in his ability to use illustration. His power of **imagination** was so acute that it was the key both to the effectiveness of his logic and application; it was the key to their "merger". Only **Spurgeon** (perhaps) was more vivid in "sense appeal",<sup>49</sup> and **Spurgeon** was not (in my estimation) Edwards' equal in logic and argument.

Illustration or Imagination refers to mental images. His speech was in living color--it engaged **all five senses**. He did not just help the hearer learn the truth, but to see, hear, touch the **truth**.

For example, Edwards says, "your good deeds cannot earn a place in heaven", but he adds, "no more than a spider web can stop a falling rock."<sup>50</sup> Why does that addition (concerning the rock and web) make that statement so much more gripping, attention-grabbing, and affecting than if it were omitted? Does it give you new information? No! Instead, it makes the information **new**. Sermons don't just have to be born, they must be **born** again!

A perusal of Edwards' **sermons** shows that he does not just drop an occasional anecdote, but he takes an particular image and "**milks**" it, constantly relating **truth** to it, choosing other Biblical texts. **For** example, in "Sinners in the Hands of an **Angry** God", in which he is using the image of "heaviness", he pulls in Rom. 8, saying--"creation groans with you - you are a burden to it" (p. 9, vol. II, Works). Edwards sees images as central to conveying truth and reaching the **affections**. When he uses several images in a row, they hold a common meaning. Notice, in "**Sinners**", the heaviness, the waters dammed up, the bent bow, and then a return to the dropping as a spider (p. 9, vol. II, Works). In all cases, there is a vivid sense of precariousness, and of inevitable disaster.

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Sibbes, Works, Vol.I, p. 66.

<sup>49</sup> See Jay E. Adams, Studies in Preaching: Sense Appeal in the Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (Presbyterian and Reformed).

<sup>50</sup> A paraphrase of "all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock." in Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, in Works, vol.II (Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 9.

Andrew Blackwood sees three stages of imagination - 1) descriptive (simply reminding the hearers of a scene by providing selected detail). 2) synthetic (putting together known things into a new, fresh picture), 3) and creative (a very startling form of synthetic).<sup>51</sup> Edwards was highly descriptive. He talks of the "clouds of God's wrath", not just "displeasure". But he was also synthetic and creative. He personifies nature: "the sun does not willingly shine, the air willingly come in" (p. 9, vol. II, Works). He talks of "The weight of omnipotence crushing" (p. 10, vol. II, Works).

## 2. *A Theology of Imagination*

Imagination is thinking by seeing, as distinguished from reasoning. Edwards had a theology that held these two (reasoning and seeing) together, rather than a theology that pitted them against one another.

In the fourth Sign of Holy Affections. Edwards states that "our minds are so enlightened that we obtain proper and spiritual views of divine things." In this section, Edwards distinguishes between two false views of spiritual knowledge. On the one hand, "mere speculative knowledge" is not in view. Spiritual knowledge leads the mind "not only [to]speculate, but to feel and relish". (p.199) Spiritual knowledge is not less than intellectual, but it is also "connected to the affections".

On the other hand, mere imagination is not spiritual knowledge. "For instance. when a person is affected by a lively idea suddenly excited in his mind, of a very beautiful countenance, a vivid light, or some other extraordinary appearance. there is something conceived in the mind, but there is nothing of the nature of instruction. Persons do not become wiser by such conceptions, or know more about God..." (p. 193-194, A Treatise on Religious Affections. American Tract ed.) Having said that, Edwards qualifies: "I do not assert, however, that no affections are spiritual which are attended by something imaginary. When our minds are fully occupied, and our thoughts intensely engaged, our imaginations are often stronger, and our ideas more lively.... But there is a great difference between lively imaginations arising from strong affections. and strong affections arising from lively imaginations. Undoubtedly the former often exist in cases of truly gracious affection. The affections do not arise from the imagination. nor have they any dependence upon it: but on the contrary, the imagination is only the accidental effect. or consequence of the affection, through the infirmity of human nature. But when the affection arises from the imagination. and is built upon it. instead of being founded upon spiritual illumination, then is the affection, however elevated, of no value." (p. 212).

What do we see here? A far more careful and balanced refinement of the views of Sibbes and Ames. Like Ames, Edwards sees the goal of preaching to be the affecting of the "whole person"-the will and "godly notions". Thus the aim of each sermon is to produce a godly "affection", or spiritual knowledge. Edwards' preaching never aims to tell someone about God's holiness, but to produce zeal for the holiness of the Lord. and so on.

Secondly. Edwards also sees that **the** imagination is "often" or usually involved in spiritual knowledge or the rise of spiritual affections. Edwards is careful to explain that the imagination must be based upon an illuminated view of Biblical truth. It is possible to do an "end run" around the exposition of Biblical information; we may provide extremely vivid, strong illustrations which arouse only emotions, but do not affect the heart or center of our being. Instead, Edwards **warns** that our imaginations must arise out of the spiritual understanding of the **truth**.

The modern media, controlled by technology and its dynamics reduces **everything** into commodity. It emphasized appearances and image rather than character and substance. Joe

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<sup>51</sup> Andrew W. Blackwood, Preaching from the Bible (Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1941). pp. 203-209.

McGinnis, in The Selling of the President quotes a memo from a presidential speechwriter: "the response is to the image not to the man...it's not what's there that counts, but what is projected..." Video-media and even print media (e.g. USA Today) are discarding reflection, exposition, and **explanation** for gestures, postures, symbols, and images. We no longer have ideas, but opinions. Many modern evangelicals have uncritically adapted to the modern audience by eschewing exposition and teaching, and by moving to communication that stresses pictures and anecdotes which appeal directly to the emotions. Modern theology gets in step with "the New Hermeneutic" which insists that language has no conceptual content. Rather, language is "an event", it is "proclamation", not information.

On the other hand, in a reaction to modern culture and modern linguistic theory, many orthodox Christians have retreated in fear to a concept of preaching as the transmission of Biblical **truth** to the hearers in accurate propositions. They do exposition with little or no **imagination** or application, because their aim is not at the affections, but only the intellect. In this approach, they have gone back, not only past Edwards, but past his Puritan forbears. (Some would say, rather, that there has always been a strong preaching tradition of "dead orthodoxy" in **all** ages!)

### 3. Principles for Illustrating

Let's finish **with** some practical principles and definitions.

a. Illustration is the ability to bring Biblical truth into the concrete world of the audience. We can say it another way--illustrations above all make preaching simple. This is why **J.C.Ryle**, in his essay "Simplicity in Preaching", says:

"If you would attain simplicity in preaching, you must use plenty of anecdotes and illustrations...People like similies, illustrations, and well-told stories, and will listen to them when they will attend to nothing else...He is the best speaker, says an Arabian proverb, who can turn the ear into an **eye**."<sup>52</sup>

Ryle **points** out that "people **will** listen" to **illustrations** as nothing else. Why? Because illustration is a form of audience adaptation. Remember the principle of "**specificness**" we mentioned in the previous chapter.

b. Therefore, illustration is the ability to evoke the audience's senses. Jay Adams calls illustration "sense appeal" or "vividness". Like Sibbes and Edwards, Adams recognizes that

"there is a great difference between thinking about something and experiencing it. Thinking about it means there is a significant emotional distance from it; experiencing it means there is a cold chill that runs up your spine when it comes to **mind**...When a preacher...**stimulates** one or more of the five senses, thus triggering emotion, then the listener may be said to 'experience' the event. In that way, the event will become 'real' to him, which means it has become concretized (or personalized), memorable, and, in **the** fullest sense of the word, **understandable**."<sup>53</sup>

Adams puts it very practically. For a preacher to really effect the heart, he must describe and illustrate in a way which "stimulates" the five senses.

c. Use both analogies **and** examples.

I see two **kinds** of illustrations. First, there are "analogy-illustrations". These are pictures of concrete, material situations which demonstrate the operations of Biblical principles and relationships between Biblical truths. Jesus' Parable of the Sower is an analogy-illustration.

<sup>52</sup> J.C.Ryle, The Upper Room: Being a Few Truths for the Times. (Banner of Truth, 1977), pp. 48-49.

<sup>53</sup> Adams, p. 86.

The Sower's activities show how the gospel of the kingdom (an immaterial object) affects the heart of man (another immaterial object). With this illustration, Jesus "fleshed out" a Biblical truth into the world of his hearers, all of whom belonged to an agrarian culture.

A second kind of illustration is the "example-illustration". This is a picture of how a particular Biblical principle is actually practiced or applied in daily life. In Luke 3, John the Baptist preaches on "fruits worthy of repentance", and then provides specific "example-illustrations" to several classes of hearers. He calls taxcollectors and soldiers to practice integrity in their work; he calls all people to share with the poor (w.10-14). These are example-illustrations. While Jesus' illustration (Parable of the Sower) was not out to teach about agricultural practice, John's illustrations were aimed to teach about stewardship of wealth.

Both kinds of illustrations have the same purpose--to enter the audience's world and show how truth is fleshed out and lived out. C.S.Lewis actually wrote one extended illustration in his Chronicles of Narnia. He showed how the gospel would incarnate itself in a world of talking animals. In the course of his writing, we see old truths given freshness.

d. Use both **similies** and stories

**Similies** are brief comparisons--often one sentence, or one phrase. When Edwards says that our good deeds are no more a support than a spider web, he is using similie. Extended illustrations are longer anecdotes which tell a whole story.<sup>54</sup> When many preachers seek to "add more illustration" to their sermons, they usually delve into books of stories and longer illustrations. But similies are important too. A preacher must use vivid language throughout his discourse, generously sprinkling everywhere little word pictures which stimulate the senses constantly. The Puritans were masters at this. Read William Gurnall's The Christian in Complete Armor. I challenge the reader to find Gurnall ever going more than three sentences without an illustration.

4. *More from Edwards.*

Contemporaray communication experts say--'give people pilgrimage not propositions. experience, not exposition'. But JE has a far more profound understanding of what a spiritual experience is. 'Pilgrimage, not propositions' pits feelings and thinking against one another, but Edwards refused to do that. Edwards rejected the old 'lower animal nature' vs. 'higher rational nature' which was assumed by modem AND post-modem people. It is a pagan notion. This is what John Millbank called 'the ontology of violence' that polytheism **posited--multiple** gods, multiple power centers. reality is by nature chaotic, violent struggle. Edwards, however, believed that the Bible taught the unity of the faculties. He refused to suppose an opposition between the understanding and the deepest affections of the heart. Gracious affections of love and joy are raised up only when a person has a 'spiritual understanding' of the true nature of God. In other words, if a person says, 'I know God cares for me, but I am still paralyzed by fear'. Edwards would reply, 'then that means you really don't know or understand that God cares for you. If you did, then the affection of confidence and hope would be rising within you.' In that case, the implications for preaching are as follows:

#1- You DO expound truth--not pit vs. experience. So the **first** implication for preaching--is that you shouldn't pit experience against reason. Edwards in *Religious Affections* says "***If the things of religion are treated according to their nature, and exhibited truly, so as tends to convey just apprehensions, and a right judgment of them the more they have a tendency to move the affections, the better.***" (p.121-22) Or as he says in that great passage Divine Supernatural Light: *Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness. A*

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<sup>54</sup> Jay E. Adams, "Sense Appeal and Storytelling", in The Preacher and Preaching.

*man may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind.*" You can have cognitive knowledge without experiential knowledge, but not vica versa.

The church today does not buy Edwards unified field view of the faculties. For example, the average churchgoer is not generous with his/her money in Biblical proportions. What does the preacher assume? "They understand what should do--tithes--they are just not doing it!" So the preacher goes right for the will (with guilt). or maybe for the emotions (with sentimental stories of starving children with big eyes). But Edwards had so much more integrity; he treated the auditors with more respect. If the people are materialistic and ungenerous, (in Edwards' view) it means they have not *truly* understood how Jesus, though rich, became poor for them. It means they have not *truly* understood what it means that in Christ we have all riches and treasures. It *means* their 'affections' are clinging to material things--their souls are inclined toward riches as a source of spiritual security, hope, and beauty. They may have superficial intellectual grasp of Jesus' spiritual wealth, but they do not truly grasp it. The mind has not been *illuminated* by the truth--it has not seen the beauty and excellency of Christ. Of course, the main cause is sin but the secondary cause is (probably) preaching that has not aimed for a sense of the heart of the truth. In preaching we must re-present Christ in the particular way that he replaces the place of material things has in their affections. This takes not just intellectual argument, but the presentation of the *beauty* of Christ.

#2- But *HOW* do you present and expound the truth? The reason is ultimately engaged in order to effect the imagination. Why? Edwards believed that ultimate spiritual reality was beauty, and that beauty consisted of relationships. As deeply rational as he was--and as skillful a logician--his main goal in preaching was to show the coherence, symmetry, fittingness and ultimate beauty of truth. Edwards believed only when the mind perceived the 'excellency' of God it had really grasped the truth! Edwards believed that at the root of the heart's affections was the search for 'excellency'--that which is appreciated and rested in for its own sake.<sup>55</sup> Edwards essentially defined a nominal Christian as one who finds Christ *useful* (to get those things the heart found 'excellent' or beautiful), while a true Christian is one who finds Christ *beautiful* for who he is in himself. Of course only the Holy Spirit can provide this, but *the* preacher's job was to provide the Holy Spirit with the right vehicle and means--the truth!

**JE's** very first **sermon**, "Christian Happiness", written incredibly at age 17 or 18, asks a remarkably simple question--"Why should Xns be happy?" The outline of the **sermon** is simply an argument on why believers should be most happy. His three headings (my paraphrase):

- 1) Because our bad things will turn out for good,
- 2) Because our truly good things can *never* be taken from us.
- 3) and because the best things are yet to come!

That **is** a perfect **sermon**. 1) First, it provides compressed depth of analysis. It fits 'oceans of truth' *into* nutshells I can use any time I want. Instant access to reams of Biblical teaching. 2) Second, the topics build upward in an absolutely straight line. Each builds on the others. It is powerful and comprehensive *logically*. But notice--it is also coherent emotionally. You are **taken** from the valley up into the mountain. They followed logically, yet there is a beauty about how they progress. 3) At the end Edwards goes to the heart: *Assert your own liberty! Don't suffer yourselves to be such mean slaves! Don't exercise yourselves any longer in acting below yourselves, in wallowing and rolling yourselves in the mire. Those be not the pleasures of a man! The pleasures of trusting in Jesus Christ in contemplating his beauties, excellencies, and glories: in contemplating his love to mankind and to us. in contemplating his infinite goodness and astonishing loving-kindness.*

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<sup>55</sup> See 'A Divine and Supernatural Light', pp. 111-114 and "The Mind", pp. 22-28 in *Reader*.

## ADORING CHRIST

## CHAPTER 10 -

HOW?  
PREACHING AND WORSHIP

## A. UPHEAVALS IN WORSHIP TODAY

## 1. THE PROBLEM: WORSHIP WARS

One of the basic features of church life in the U.S. today is the proliferation of worship and music forms. This in turn has caused many severe conflicts both within individual congregations and whole denominations. Most books and articles about recent worship trends tend to fall into one of two broad categories.<sup>56</sup> "Contemporary Worship" (hereafter CW) advocates often make rather sweeping statements, such as "pipe organs and choirs will never reach people today." "Historic Worship" (hereafter HW) advocates often speak similarly about how incomparably corrupt popular music and culture is, and how they make contemporary worship completely unacceptable.<sup>57</sup>

## a. Contemporary Worship: Plugging In?

One CW advocate writes vividly that we must 'plug in' our worship in to three power sources: "the sound system, the Holy Spirit, and contemporary culture."<sup>58</sup> But several problems attend the promotion of strictly contemporary worship.

First, some popular music does have severe limitations for worship. Critics of popular culture argue that much of it is the product of mass-produced commercial interests. As such, it is often marked by sentimentality, a lack of artistry, sameness, and individualism in a way that traditional folk art was not.

Second, when we ignore historic tradition we break our solidarity with Christians of the past. Part of the richness of our identity as Christians is that we are saved into a historic people. An unwillingness to consult tradition is not in keeping with either Christian humility or Christian community. Nor is it a thoughtful response to the post-modern rootlessness which now leads so many to seek connection to ancient ways and peoples.

Finally, any worship that is strictly contemporary will become 'dated' very, very quickly. Also, it will necessarily be gauged to a very narrow 'market niche.' When Peter Wagner says we should

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<sup>56</sup> As one of many examples, see Michael S. Hamilton, "The Triumph of the Praise Songs," *Christianity Today* (July 12, 1999) vol.43, no.8, p.28. He speaks of 'Reformers' who value tradition and look for greater unity among churches through common liturgical forms and of 'Revolutionaries' who promote contemporary music and who encourage broad diversity in worship style.

<sup>57</sup> Representative figures who emphasize historic continuity, tradition, high culture, and theological exposition in worship are Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down* (Eerdmans, 1995) and David Wells, "A Tale of Two Spiritualities" in *Losing Our Virtue* (Eerdmans, 1998). (See also the web page for "Church Music at a Crossroads": <http://www.xlggroup.net/cm.ac>.) Examples of those urging a move to contemporary worship with emphasis "visual communication, music, sensations, and feelings" are Lyle Schaller "Worshipping with New Generations" in *21 Bridges to the 21st Century* (Abingdon, 1994) and C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches* (Regal, 1998).

<sup>58</sup> See C. Peter Wagner, who says that contemporary worship: "ts 'plugged in' to three important power sources: the sound system, the Holy Spirit, and contemporary culture" p.3 of "Another New Wineskin—the New Apostolic Reformation" in *Next* (Leadership Network: Jan-Mar, 1999). That is a good description of tradition-eschewing contemporary worship.

'plug in' to contemporary culture, *which* contemporary culture does he mean? White, black, Latin, urban, suburban, 'Boomer,' or 'GenX' contemporary culture? Just ten years ago, Willow Creek's contemporary services were considered to be 'cutting edge.' Today, most younger adults find them dated and 'hokey.'<sup>59</sup>

Hidden (but not well!) in the arguments of contemporary worship enthusiasts is the assumption that culture is basically neutral. Thus there is no reason why we cannot wholly adapt our worship to any particular cultural form. But worship that is not rooted in any particular historic tradition will often lack the critical distance to critique and avoid the excesses and distorted sinful elements of the particular surrounding, present culture. For example, how can we harness contemporary Western culture's accessibility and frankness, but not its individualism and psychologizing of moral problems?

#### b. Historic Worship--Pulling Out?

HW advocates, on the other hand, are strictly 'high culture' promoters, who defend themselves from charges of elitism by arguing that modern pop music is inferior to traditional folk art.<sup>60</sup> But problems also attend the promotion of strictly traditional, historic worship.

First, HW advocates cannot really dodge the charge of cultural elitism. A realistic look at the Christian music arising from the grassroots folk cultures of Latin America, Africa, and Asia (not commercially produced pop music centers) reveals many of the characteristics of contemporary praise and worship music--simple and accessible tunes, driving beat, repetitive words, and emphasis on **experience**.<sup>61</sup> In the U.S., an emphasis on strictly high culture music and **art** will probably only appeal to college educated elites.

Second, any proponent of 'historic' worship will have to answer the question--'whose' history? Much of what is called 'traditional' worship is rooted in northern European culture. While strict CW advocates may bind worship too heavily to one present culture, strict HW advocates may bind it too heavily to a past culture. Do we really want to assume that the 16th century Northern European approach to emotional expression and music (incarnate in the Reformation tradition) **was completely** Biblically informed and must be preserved?

Hidden (but not well!) in the arguments of traditional worship advocates is the assumption that certain historic forms are more pure, Biblical, and untainted by human cultural accretions. Those who argue against cultural relativism must also remember the essential relativity of all traditions. Just as it is a lack of humility to disdain tradition, it is also a lack of humility (and a blindness to **the 'noetic'** effects of sin) to elevate any particular tradition or culture's way of doing worship. A refusal to adapt a tradition to new realities may come under Jesus' condemnation of making our favorite human culture into an idol, equal to the Scripture in **normativity (Mark 7:8-9)**<sup>62</sup> While CW advocates do not seem to recognize the sin in all

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<sup>59</sup> The critique of Willow Creek as a 'dated' and 'Boomer' model can be found in Sally Morgenthaler, "Out of the **Box**: Authentic Worship in a Postmodern Culture," *Worship Leader*, May-June, 1998, p.24ff. This and an interview with musician Fernando Ortega in *Prism* Nov/Dec 1997 are indications of some major cracks in the foundation of evangelical assumptions about what kind of services will reach young secular people. **However**, if a church abandons 'Boomer' contemporary music for more alternative rock, won't it be in the same position in another 10-15 years that Willow Creek is in now? More historic worship forms have a better claim to durability.

<sup>60</sup> Marva Dawn **does** an excellent job of distilling Ken Myer's concerns about pop music in her chapter "Throwing the Baby Out with the Bath Water" in *Reaching Out*, p.183ff.

<sup>61</sup> See "The Triumph of the Praise Songs," *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> **Too often**, advocates for 'high culture' or 'pop culture' worship music **try** to make their advocacy a matter of theological principle, when their conviction is really more a matter of their own tastes and cultural preferences. For example, when pressed, HW advocates admit that jazz is not really a product of **commercial pop culture**, but **qualifies** as a high culture medium which grew out of genuine folk roots and requires great skill and craft and **can** express a fuller range of human experience than rock and pop

cultures, the HW advocates do not seem to recognize the amount of (common) grace in all cultures.

### c. Bible, Tradition, and Culture

At this point, the reader will anticipate that I am about to unveil some grand 'Third Way' between two extremes. Indeed, many posit a third approach called "Blended" worship.<sup>63</sup> But it is not so simple as that. My major complaint is that both sides are equally simplistic in the process by which they shape their worship.

CW advocates consult a) the Bible and b) contemporary culture, while HW advocates consult a) the Bible and b) historic tradition. But we forge worship best when we consult a) the Bible, b) the cultural context of our **community**,<sup>64</sup> and c) the historic tradition of our **church**.<sup>65</sup> The result of this more complex process will not be simply a single, third "middle way"; there are at least nine worship traditions in Protestantism **alone**.<sup>66</sup> That is why the book you are reading provides examples of culturally relevant worship that nonetheless deeply appreciates and reflects its historic tradition.

This more complex approach is extremely important to follow. The Bible simply does not give us enough details to shape an entire worship service. When the Bible calls us to sing God's praises, we are not given the tunes nor the rhythm. We are not told how repetitive the lyrics are to be or not to be, nor how emotionally intense the singing should be. When we are commanded to do corporate prayer, we are not told whether those prayers should be written, unison prayers or **extemporary**.<sup>67</sup> So to give any concrete form to our worship, we must "fill in

**music.** (See Calvin M. Johansson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint* (Hendrickson. 1984) pp.59-62 on 'Folk Music and Jazz.') On their own principles, then, there is no reason for traditionalists not to allow jazz music in worship, yet I see no Tradition-worship proponents encouraging jazz liturgies! Why not? I think that they are going on their own aesthetic preferences.

<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, for many people 'blended' worship consists of a simple, wooden 50-50 division between contemporary songs and traditional hymns. This is often quite jarring and unhelpful. It is more of a political compromise than the result of reflection about your community's culture and your church's tradition. A far better example of a 'Third Way' is Robert E. Webber, *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (Hendrickson. 1996). Webber is talking of a more organic blend of liturgical elements, content-ful preaching, and a variety of music forms. In many ways my essay agrees with Webber's basic thrust. We would not use the term 'blended worship,' however, because it usually connotes the political compromise mentioned above. On the problems of 50-50 music division, see comments at end of the paper, under "Selecting Worship Music".

<sup>64</sup> A **good** case for a balanced view of consulting culture **within** an evangelical view of the authority of Scripture is made by Andrew F. Walls in "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture" and "The Translation Principle in Christian History" in his *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1996).

<sup>65</sup> A **good** case for a balanced view of consulting tradition within an evangelical view of the authority of Scripture is made by Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon for Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans. 1993). pp.83-101. He writes that Christian humility makes us recognize the reality of our biases and prejudices when coming to Scripture. This means it is unbiblical (in our doctrine of sin) to think we can find the Biblical 'way' without consulting our own tradition and other tradition to check our own Scriptural **findings**. See also John Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*. (John Knox, 1981) Chapter I - "Traditioning the Faith."

<sup>66</sup> James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Abingdon. 1993) p.107. identifies the Protestant worship traditions as follows:

16th cent:	Anabaptist. (Continental)Reformed. Anglican. Lutheran
17th cent:	Quaker, Puritan/Reformed
18th cent:	Methodist
19th cent:	Frontier
20th cent:	Pentecostal

<sup>67</sup> John M. Frame (*Worship in Spirit and Truth*. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996) does a good job of **showing** how great a variety of forms the basic Biblical elements can take. Some have argued against the



the blanks" that the Bible leaves open. When we do so, we will have to draw on a) tradition, b) the needs, capacities and cultural sensibilities of our people, and c) our own personal preferences. Though we cannot avoid drawing on our own preferences, this should never be the driving force (cf. Romans 15:1-3). Thus, if we fail to do the hard work of consulting both tradition and culture, we will--wittingly or unwittingly--just tailor music to please ourselves.

## 2. A SHOCK TO THE SEEKER-SENSITIVE WORSHIP *MOVEMENT*

Sally Morgenthaler's interview with young pastors (Chris Seay, Mar Driscoll, Ron Johnson, Doug Pagitt, Clark Crebar) in *Worship Leader* (May/June 1998) "Authentic Worship in a Postmodern Culture" and Fernando Ortega's interview in *Prism* in Nov/Dec 1997 are indications of some major cracks in the foundation of evangelical assumptions about what kind of services will reach 'secular' people.

The crisis (that is here? coming?) in the church growth movement due to the fact that the attack on seeker-sensitive worship is coming from inside, that is, from the pastors of fast growing 'mega-churches' (though the name and category is eschewed) filled with under-30's. These pastors claim that the Willow Creek inspired services supposedly adapted for the unchurched were calibrated for a very narrow and transitory kind of unchurched person: namely, college educated, white, Baby Boomers, suburbanites. The increasingly multi-ethnic, less rational/word-oriented, urban oriented and more secular generations under the age of 35 are not the same kind of 'unchurched' people. The critique is that Willow Creek 'over-adapted' to the rational, a-historical 'high modern' world-view.

The younger pastors say that Willow Creek services do several things that alienate the seekers of **their** generations.

a) It removed transcendence from its services by utilizing light, happy music and tone, complete accessibility of voice, using dramatic sketches that create a nightclub or TV-show atmosphere. But their generations hunger for awe.

b) It ditched connection to history and tradition and went completely contemporary in all cultural references. from sermon illustrations to decoration to antiseptic 'suburban mall/office building' setting. But their generations hunger for rootedness, and love a pastiche of ancient and modern.

c) It emphasized polish and technical excellence and slick professionalism and management technique, while their generations hunger for authenticity and community rather than programs.

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use of choirs and **solos** on the basis of the 'Regulative Principle', namely, that they are not prescribed by Scripture. But Frame asks, if some are allowed to pray aloud, while the rest of the congregation meditates, why **can't** some be allowed to sing or play aloud, while the rest of the congregation meditates? (p.129) Why would song be regulated **in** a different way than prayer and preaching? Some have argued against using hymns and non-Scriptural songs on the basis of the Regulative Principle. But Frame asks, if we are **allowed** to **pray** or to preach using our own words (based on Scripture), why **can** we not sing **using** our **own** words (**based** on Scripture)? (p.127) Why would song be regulated **in** a different way than prayer and preaching? Some have argued against the use of dance in worship, but aside from many apparent references to **dance** in worship **in** the Psalter, Frame **asks**, if we **are** exhorted to raise hands (**Neh.2:8; Ps.28:2; 1 Tim.2:8**), clap hands (**Ps.47:1**), and fall down (**1 Cor.14:25**) is it not expected and natural that we accompany words with actions? (p.131) We can't preach, surely, **without** using our bodies to express our thoughts and words, so how **can** we arbitrarily 'draw the line' to exclude dance? Frame points out that the **real way** to make decisions about these issues (such as dance) **is** wisdom and love--namely, what **will edify**? In other words, if you think that dancers in leotards will be too **distracting** and sexually **provocative** for your congregation, just say so--don't try to prove that the Bible forbids it. It is a bad habit of mind to **seek** to **label** 'forbidden' what is really just unwise.

d) It emphasizes rationality and practical 'how-to' maps, while their generations hunger for narrative and the personal.

Most of the critique has taken over the Leadership Network, which used to be one of the main carriers of the Willow Creek vision.

## B. A SOLUTION: EVANGELISTIC WORSHIP

### 1. *Two* models, with problems

The most thoughtful members of the Seeker Friendly Service movement agree that the straight "seeker service" is not really worship, and therefore new believers are brought out of the seeker service into a weekly worship service for believers. The critics, on the other hand, generally see the worship service as the place for renewing and **edifying** believers who then go out into the world to do evangelism. The two models then, seem to be:

Seeker service [evangelism]--> Worship service (*edification*)  
 Worship service (*edification*)--> World (evangelism!)

There are pragmatic problems with both models. The SFC model is financially very expensive, it is hard to assimilate new Christians out of seeker services into real worship services. And if the main worship service is very oriented toward seekers. the Christians often feel **under-fed**.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand the critics cannot avoid the charge that they are not proposing any alternative to the current evangelistically ineffective church. One critic is very typical when he writes: "While we [the seeker-friendly church] **try** to entice the world to come to church to hear the Gospel. the New Testament proclaims a powerful church worshipping God going out into the world in order to reach the lost (cf. The book of Acts). True revivals have historically proved...that a revived and healthy church reaches a dying and lost world through its own

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<sup>68</sup> Some disadvantages of the SFC approach:

1) Expense issue. It is extremely expensive and **difficult** to do seeker services well. Essentially, they don't "work" unless the unchurched person feels the **act** is as good as what they could pay to see in a theater. Many SFC attempts are mediocre. and unless you hit a "home run" every time. the effect is quite discouraging.

2) Sunday issue. Also, when Sunday is the day for seeker-focused services, it gives the world the impression that this is the people of **God** in worship. that "this is all there is." **And** it isn't good for Christians to have to squeeze their weekly worship into a weeknight evening, between two busy days of labor. It robs Christians of a whole day for worship and **renewl** (I Cor 16:1).

3) Assimilation issue. Regular weekly seeker-focused services can also create a large assimilation problem. If a person comes to Christianity through a seeker service, he or she may settle into that environment for weekly worship. Supposedly, the new Christian is to be invited out of the "seeker" service **into** worship, but the jump is not easy to accomplish. In one church. new believers through the seeker service could not be assimilated into the regular worship, because the "believers worship" was so **totally** oriented toward long-time Christians who are immersed in the evangelical sub-culture and inhabit a very different world than the new Christian. (See Ed Dobson. *Starting a Seeker Sensitive Service* (Zondervan, 1993), p.83) And if the seeker service **becomes** the worship service of the new believers, either those new Christians will not be fed properly, or the service will inch over into becoming more of a contemporary worship service, and will lose its effectiveness in outreach.

4) Friendship evangelism issue. The most effective way to reach a non-believer is for a Christian to share the gospel **with** him or her in the context of a friendship. But if a Christian wants to bring a non-Christian friend to a seeker-focused weekly service, he or she **will** have to come out **twice** a week. once to **take** the friend to church, and once to get his or her own nurture.

5) Nurture issue. We said a church may have one seeker-sensitive service that is heavily focused on the unchurched. but which serves as the weekly worship for believers. As time goes on, however, the Christians often hunger for something "deeper". In response to complaints. the pastor often "gets more **meaty**" **and** begins to lose the non-Christians.

awakened people."<sup>69</sup> This view says, "evangelism will take care of itself as long as we have great worship". But the history of revivals also shows us innovations in outreach.

The Great Awakening was marked by two men who were remarkable innovators--George Whitefield in evangelism and John Wesley in organization. Many criticize seeker services because they are "not worship" and contain many elements of "entertainment". Often they call us to look, instead at the revivals of the past. But they do not criticize George Whitefield for attracting huge crowds to his own "seeker programs". He drew people into open air meetings with a kind of preaching that was unparalleled at the time in its popular appeal--his humor, his stories, his dramatically acted-out illustrations, and his astounding oratorical gifts drew tens of **thousands**.<sup>70</sup> At the time he was **labeled** an "entertainer". His meetings were not worship nor did they replace worship, but they were certainly critical to the revival. They provided Christians with a remarkable place to do friendship evangelism. His meetings were all over the city on virtually everyday of the week. Whitefield's evangelism was **enormously** aggressive and passionate. His preaching was racy and popular yet pointed toward the transcendent and holy God. Yet his public meetings shared many of the characteristics (and criticisms) of seeker services today.

**Whitefield and Wesley** did not become instruments of revival by simply being great expository preachers **and** renewing historic worship.

My main problem with the two models, however, is theological. They both assume that worship cannot be highly evangelistic. I want to show that this is a false premise. Churches would do best to make their "main course" an evangelistic worship **service**, supplemented by **both** a) numerous, variegated, creative, even daily (but not weekly) seeker-focused events, and b) intense meetings for Bible study and corporate prayer for revival and renewal.

## 2. Theological basis

a. God commanded Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory. Zion is to be the center of world-winning worship (Isaiah 2:2-4; 56:6-8). "Let this be *written for a future* generation, *that* a people not yet created may praise *the* Lord..so the name *of the Lord will* be declared in **Zion and his** praise in Jerusalem when the peoples **and the** kingdoms assemble *to* worship *the* Lord (Psalm 102:18). Psalm 105 is a direct command to believers engage in evangelistic worship. The Psalmist challenges them to "**make** known among *the* nations what **he has** done" (v.1). **How?** "**Sing** to him, sing praise *to him*; tell of **his wonderful** acts" (v.2) Thus believers are continually told to sing and praise God before the unbelieving nations. (See also Psalm 47:1; 100:1-5). God is to be praised **before all** the nations, and **as** he is praised by his people, the nations are summoned and called to join in song.

b. Peter tells a Gentile church. "**But** you are **a** chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to **God, that** you **may declare the praises** of him **who** called you out of darkness **into his marvellous light**." (I Peter 2:9). This shows us that the church is challenged to the same witness that Israel **was** called to--evangelistic worship. A key difference: in the Old Testament, **the** center of world-winning worship was Mt. Zion, but now, wherever we worship Jesus in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-26) we have come to the heavenly Zion (Heb.12:18-24). In other words, the risen Lord now sends his people out singing his praises in mission, calling the nations to join both **saints** and angels in heavenly doxology. Jesus himself stands in the midst of the redeemed and leads us in the singing of God's praises (Hebrews 2:12), even as **God** stands over **his** redeemed and sings over us in joy (Zeph. 2:17).

<sup>69</sup> John H. Armstrong, "The Mad Rush to Seeker Sensitive Worship". Modern Reformation, Jan/Feb 1995, p.25.

<sup>70</sup> Harry S. Stout. The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism (Eerdmans, 1991).

### 3. Biblical cases

#### I Corinthians 14:24-25.

Paul is addressing the misuse of the gift of tongues. He complains that tongues speaking will cause unbelievers to say they are out of their minds (v.23). He insists that the worship service must be comprehensible to them. He says that if an unbeliever "or *unlearned one*" (an uninitiated inquirer) comes in, and worship is being done "unto edification", "*he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all*" (v.24). Of what does this conviction consist? "*The secrets of his heart will be laid bare*" (v.25). It may mean he realizes that the worshippers around him are finding in God what his heart had been secretly searching for, but in the wrong ways. It may mean the worship shows him how his heart works. The result: "*so falling on his face, he will worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you'*" (v.25).

#### Acts 2

When the Spirit falls on those in the upper room, a crowd gathers (v.5) because a) they are hearing the disciples praising God ("*we hear them declaring the wonders of God*" v.11), and b) and also because this worship is "*in our own tongues*" (v.11). As a result, they are first made very interested ("*amazed and perplexed they asked one another, 'what does this mean'*" v.11), and later they are convicted deeply ("*they were cut to the heart and said, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'*" v.37).

#### Comparison

There are obvious differences between the two situations. I Cor 14 pictures conversion happening on the spot (which is certainly possible). In Acts 2 the non-believers are shaken out of their indifference (v.12), but the actual conversions (v.37-41) occurred at the end of an "after meeting" in which Peter explained the gospel (v.14-36) and showed them how to individually receive Christ (v.38-39). It is often pointed out that the tongues in the two situations are different. But students usually are looking so carefully at what the two passages teach about tongues and prophecy that they fail to note what they teach about worship and evangelism. We can learn this:

- a) Non-believers are expected to be present in Christian worship. In Acts 2 it happens by word-of-mouth excitement. In I Cor 14 it is probably the result of personal invitation by Christian friends. But Paul in 14:23 expects both "*unbelievers*" and "*the unlearned* (literally "a seeker"-- "one who does not understand") to be present in worship.
- b) Non-believers must find the praise of Christians to be *comprehensible*. In Acts 2 it happens by miraculous divine intervention. In I Cor 14 it happens by human design and effort. But it cannot be missed that Paul directly tells a local congregation to adapt its worship because of the presence of unbelievers. It is a false dichotomy to insist that if we are seeking to please God we must not ask what the unchurched feel or think about our worship.
- c) Non-believers can fall under conviction and be converted *through* comprehensible worship. In I Cor 14 it happens during the service, but in Acts 2 it is supplemented by "after meetings" and follow-up evangelism. God wants the world to overhear us worshipping him. God directs his people not to simply worship, but to sing his praises "before the nations". We are not to simply communicate the gospel to them, but celebrate the gospel before them.

### 4. Three practical tasks

#### B. Getting unbelievers into worship.

The numbering is not a mistake. This task actually comes second, but nearly everyone thinks it comes first! It is natural to believe that they must get non-Christians into worship before they can begin "doxological evangelism". But the reverse is the case. Non-Christians do

not get invited into worship unless the worship is already evangelistic. The only way they will have non-Christians in attendance is through personal invitation by Christians. Just as in the Psalms, the "nations" must be directly asked to come. But the main stimulus to building bridges and invitation is the comprehensibility and quality of the worship experience.

Christians will instantly sense if a worship experience will be attractive to their non-Christian friends. They may find a particular service wonderfully edifying for *them* and yet know that their non-believing neighbors would react negatively. Therefore, a vicious cycle persists. Pastors see only Christians present, so they lack incentive to make their worship comprehensible to outsiders. But since they fail to make the adaptations, Christians who are there (though perhaps edified themselves) do not think to bring their skeptical and non-Christian friends to church. They do not think they will be impressed. So no outsiders come. And so the pastors respond only to the Christian audience. And so on and on. Therefore, the best way to get Christians to bring non-Christians is to worship as if there are dozens and hundreds of **skeptical** onlookers. And if you worship as if, eventually they will be there in reality.

#### A. Making worship comprehensible to unbelievers.

Our purpose is not to make the unbeliever "comfortable". (In I Cor. 14:24-25 or Acts 2:12 and 37--they are cut to the heart!) We aim to be *intelligible* to them. We must address their "*heart secrets*" (I Cor 14:25). That means we must remember what it is like to not believe; we must remember what an unbelieving heart is like. How do we do that?

**1) Worship and preaching in the "vernacular"**. It is hard to overstate how ghetto-ized our preaching is. It is **normal** to make all kinds of statements that appear persuasive to us but are based upon all sorts of premises that the secular person does not hold. It is normal to make all sorts of references using terms and phrases that mean nothing outside of our Christian sub-group. **So** avoid unnecessary theological or evangelical sub-culture "jargon". and explain carefully the basic theological concepts. such as confession of sin. praise, thanksgiving, and so on. In the preaching, showing continual willingness to address the questions that the unbelieving heart **will ask**. Speak **respectfully** and sympathetically to people who have difficulty with Christianity. As you write the sermon, imagine an particular skeptical non-Christian in the chair listening to you. Add the asides, the qualifiers, the extra explanations necessary. Listen to **everything** said in the worship service with the ears of an unbelieving heart.

**2) Explain the *service* as you go *dong***. Though there is danger of pastoral verbosity, learn to give 1 or 2 sentence, non-jargony explanations of each new part of the service. "When we confess our sins. we are not groveling in guilt, but dealing with our guilt. If you deny your sins you **will** never get free from them." It is good to begin worship **services** as the Black church often does. with a "devotional"--a brief **talk** that explains the meaning of worship. This way you **continually** instruct newcomers in worship.

**3) Directly address and welcome them** Talk regularly to "those of you who aren't sure you believe **this**. or **who** aren't sure just what you believe". Give them many asides. even expressing the language of their hearts. Articulate their objections to Christian living and belief better than they can do it themselves. Express sincere sympathy for their difficulties, even when challenging them **severely** for their selfishness and unbelief. Admonish with tears (literally or figuratively). Always **grant** whatever degree of merit their objections have. It is extremely important that the **unbeliever** feel you understand them. "I've tried it before and it did not work." "I don't **see** how my **life could** be the result of the plan of **a** loving God." "Christianity is a straghtjacket." "It **can't** be wrong if it feels so right." "I could never keep it **up**." "I don't feel worthy I **am too** bad." "I just **can't** believe."

**4) Aesthetics quality**. The power of **art** draws people to behold it. Good art and its message enters **the soul** through **the** imagination and begins to appeal to the reason, for **art** makes ideas

plausible. The quality of music and speech in worship will have a major impact on its evangelistic power. In many churches, the quality of the music is mediocre or poor, but it does not disturb the faithful. Why? Their faith makes the words of the hymn or the song meaningful despite its artistically poor expression, and further, they usually have a personal relationship with the music-presenter. But any outsider who comes in, who is not convinced of the truth and who does not have any relationship to the presenter, will be bored or irritated by the poor offering. In other words, excellent aesthetics *includes* outsiders, while mediocre or poor aesthetics *exclude*. The low level of artistic quality in many churches guarantees that only insiders will continue to come. For the non-Christian, the attraction of good art will have a major part in drawing them in.

5) *Celebrate deeds of mercy and justice.* We live in a time when public esteem of the church is plummeting. For many outsiders or inquirers, the deeds of the church will be far more important than words in gaining plausibility. The leaders of most towns see "word-only" churches as costs to their community, not a value. Effective churches will be so involved in deeds of mercy and justice that outsiders will say, "we cannot do without churches like this. This church is channeling so much value into our community through its services to people that if it went out of business, we'd have to raise everybody's taxes." Mercy deeds give the gospel *words* plausibility (Acts 4:32 followed by v.33). Therefore, evangelistic worship services should highlight *offerings* for deed ministry and should celebrate through reports and testimonies and prayer what is being done. It is best that offerings for mercy ministry be separate, attached (as traditional) to the Lord's Supper. This brings before the non-Christian the impact of the gospel on people's hearts (it makes us generous) and the impact of poured out lives on the world.

6) *Present the sacraments so as to make the gospel clear.* Baptism, and especially adult baptism, should be made a much more significant event if worship is to be evangelistic. There may need to be opportunity for the baptized to offer personal testimony as well as assent to questions. The meaning of baptism should be made clear. A moving, joyous, personal charge to the baptized (and to all baptized Christians present) should be made.-In addition, the Lord's Supper can become a converting ordinance. If it is explained properly, the unbeliever will have a very specific and visible way to see the difference between walking with Christ and living for oneself. The Lord's Supper will confront every individual with the question: "are you right with God *today? now?*" There is no more effective way to help a person to do a spiritual inventory. Many seekers in **U.S.** churches will only realize they are not Christians during the fencing of the table after an effective sermon on the meaning of the gospel. (See below for more on addressing unbelievers during communion.)

7) *Preach grace.* The one message that both believers and unbelievers need to hear is that salvation and adoption are by grace alone. A worship service that focuses too much and too often on educating Christians in the details of theology **will** simply bore or confuse the unbelievers present. For example, a sermon on abortion **will generally** assume the listener believes in the authority of the word and the authority of Jesus, and does not believe in individual moral autonomy. In other words, abortion is "doctrine D", and it is based on "doctrines A, B, and C". Therefore, people who don't believe or understand doctrines ABC **will** find such a sermon un-convicting and even alienating. This does not mean we should not preach the whole counsel of God, but we must *major* on the "ABC's" of the Christian faith.

If the response to this is "then Christians will be bored, it shows an misunderstanding of the gospel. The gospel of free, gracious justification and adoption is not just the way we enter the kingdom, but also the way we grow into the likeness of Christ. Titus 2:11-13 tells us how it is the original, saving message of "grace alone" that consequently leads us to sanctified living: "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 the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the appearing of our great God and saviour

*Jesus Christ.*" Many Christians are "defeated" and stagnant in their growth because they try to be holy for wrong motives. They say "no" to temptation by telling themselves "God will get me" or "people will find out" or "I'll hate myself in the morning" or "it will hurt my self-esteem" or "it will hurt other people" or "it's against the law--I'll be caught" or "it's against my principles" or "I will look bad". Some or all of these may be true, but Titus tells us they are inadequate. Only the grace of God. the logic of the gospel will work. Titus says it "teaches" us. it argues with us.

Therefore. the one basic message that both Christians and unbelievers need to hear is the gospel of grace. It can then be applied to both groups, right on the spot and directly. Sermons which are basically moralistic will only be applicable to either Christians OR non-Christians. But Christo-centric preaching, preaching the gospel both grows believers and challenges non-believers. If the Sunday service and sermon aim primarily at evangelism. it will bore the saints. If they aim primarily at education. they'll bore and confuse unbelievers. If they aim at praising the God who saves by grace they'll both instruct insiders and challenge outsiders.

### C. Leading to commitment.

We have seen that unbelievers in worship actually "close with Christ" in two basic ways. Some may come to Christ during the service itself (I Cor. 14:24-25). While others must be "followed up" very specifically.

1) *During the service.* One major way to invite people to receive Christ during the service is as the Lord's Supper is distributed. We may say: "if you are not in a saving relationship with God through Christ today. do not take the bread and the cup. but, as they come around. take Christ. Receive him in your heart as those around you receive the food. Then immediately afterwards. come up here and tell an officer or a pastor about what you've done, so we can get you ready to receive the Supper the next time as a child of God." Another way to invite commitment during the service is to give people a time of silence after the sermon. A "prayer of belief" could be prayed by the pastor (or printed in the bulletin at that juncture in the order of worship) to help people reach out to Christ.;" Sometimes it may be good to put a musical interlude or an offering after the sermon but before the final hymn. This affords people time to think and process what they have heard and offer themselves to God in prayer. If, however, the preacher ends his sermon. prays very briefly, and moves immediately into the final hymn. no time is given to people who are under conviction for offering up their hearts.

2) *After meetings.* Acts 2 seems to show us an "after meeting". In v.12 and 13 we are told that some folks mocked upon hearing the apostles praise and preach. but others were disturbed **and** asked "what does this *mean?*" Then Peter very specifically **explained** the gospel, and. in response to a second question "*what shall we do?*" (v.37), **explained** very specifically how to become Christians. Historically. it has been found very effective to offer such meetings to unbelievers and seekers immediately after evangelistic worship. Convicted seekers have just come from being in the presence of God, and they are often most teachable and open. To seek to "get them into a small group" or even to merely return next Sunday is **asking** a lot of them. They may be also "**amazed and** perplexed (Acts 2: 12). and it is best to "strike while the iron is hot". This is not to doubt that God is infallibly drawing his elect! That knowledge helps us to relax **as** we do evangelism. knowing that conversions are not dependent on our eloquence. But the Westminster Confession tells us that God ordinarily works through secondary causes. normal social and psychological processes. Therefore, to invite people into a follow-up meeting **immediately** is usually more conducive to "conserving the fruit of the Word.

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<sup>71</sup> An example: "Heavenly Father, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful **than** I ever before believed. but. through your Son Jesus. I can be more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you **that** he lived the **life** I should have lived, and paid **the** debt and punishment I owed. Receive me now for his **sake**. I turn **from** my **sins and** receive him as Savior. Amen."

After meetings may consist first of one or more persons who wait at the front of the auditorium to pray with and talk with any seekers who come forward to make inquiries right on the spot. A second after meeting can consist of a simple question-and-answer session with the preacher in some room near the main auditorium or even in the auditorium (after the postlude). Third, after meetings should also consist of one or two classes or small group experiences targeted to specific questions non-Christians ask about the content, relevance, and credibility of the Christian faith. After meetings should be attended by skilled lay evangelists who can come alongside of newcomers and answer spiritual questions and provide guidance as to their next steps.



## CHAPTER 11 -

## WHO? PREACHING AND COMMUNION WITH GOD

**INTRODUCTION**

While the "Normative/prophetic" aspect of preaching has to do with the preacher's relationship to the Word, and the "Situational/kingly" aspect of preaching has to do with the preacher's relationship to the hearers, the "Existential" aspect of preaching has to do with the preacher's own relationship to the *Lord*. Both in general (as a preacher) and in particular (as you preach). Another way to speak of the existential aspect is to **talk** of the sermon and preacher's relationship to the Holy Spirit.

**A. THE SPIRIT AND THE PREACHER.**

It is reported that, when George Whitefield was first approached with the idea of publishing his sermons, he agreed, but noted that, "you'll never be able to put down the thunder and lightning on the page".

That comment rings very true. Real preaching is more than the sermon. In fact, we all know this odd phenomenon--we can have good preaching without having a "good" sermon. We have all seen preachers who seemed to break all the "rules" for a sermon (poor outline, mumbling of words, etc.) yet still have a great spiritual impact on the people (and on you!). Ordinarily this is because the spiritual quality of the man's character shines through and communicates as well or better than the words of the sermon. A speaker's spiritual vitality is such a critical aspect of preaching that it can create great preaching with despite a poor sermon. On the other hand, the lack of this vitality can destroy preaching despite the presence of a good sermon.

There are **two aspects** to this aspect to explore--two parts which make up a preacher's spiritual "personality". There are his graces and his gifts.

***1. Keeping clear the difference between 'grace' and 'gift'-operation.***

I Corinthians 12 through 14 is about many things, but it is at least about this--that there is a distinction between "gift-operations" and "grace-operations" operations of the Holy Spirit. This tradition **terminology** is problematic. I know. Every spiritual **gift**, if it is a *gift* is by grace. But the distinction is important. Spiritual gifts are skills, abilities--things we do. Spiritual "fruit" or graces are qualities of character--things we are. Gifts are teaching, speaking, counseling, leading; fruit are love, joy, peace, humility, self-control.

Paul is describing a church (Corinth) where the gifts are operating at a high level but there is profound spiritual immaturity and flaws of character. Why? A "gift-operation" of the Spirit is something that does not proceed out of the level or power of a grace-changed heart. **Gifts** can operate even when your experience of God's grace is very low, when your walk with him and your joy of salvation is very weak. If you have a gift of teaching, for **example**, the classroom situation draws out your **gift**, and you may be very effective. But that operation can happen without a strong **walk with God**. Jonathan Edwards, in a **sermon** on 1 Corinthians 13, says:

*"Many bad men have had these gifts. Many will say at the last day, 'Lord Lord have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done*

*many wonderful works? [Matt. 7:21]. Such as these, who have had...gifts of the Spirit, but no special and saving [work] of the Spirit...Gifts of the Spirit are excellent things, but...they are not things which are inherent in the nature, as true grace and holiness are....gifts of the Spirit are, as it were, precious jewels, which a man carries about him. But true grace in the heart is, as it were, the preciousness of the heart, by which...the soul itself becomes a precious jewel....The Spirit of God may produce effects on many things to which he does not communicate himself. So the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, but not so as to impart himself to the waters. But when the Spirit by his ordinary influences bestows saving grace, he therein imparts himself to the soul....Yea, grace is as it were the holy nature of the Spirit of God imparted to the soul." (Jonathan Edwards. Charity and Its Fruits, Sermon Two)*

Paul's point is that this distinction--between gifts and fruit of the Spirit--is vital to bear in mind. Gift operations will always be mistaken for spiritual maturity, as evidence that God is pleased with your heart and walk with him. But that is not so. And, if anything, we Christians living today are in greater danger than in this regard. We live in an era that can be called the age of 'technique'. There has never been a society that has put more emphasis on results and skills and surfaces and less emphasis on character and reflection and depth. This is a major reason why so many of the most "blessed" ministers often have a moral 'fall' or lapse. Their gift-operations have masked the lack of -grace".

Thesis: A Christian leader leads from character before skill. Character is far more important than skills in *Christian* leadership.

a. The case put positively.

There are three basic roles or functions that a Christian minister has--preaching, pastoring/counseling, and leading. No one is gifted or equally gifted in all three areas, and yet we must do them all. The greatest factor in the long-term effectiveness of a Christian minister is how (or whether) he covers his necessarily gift-deficient areas with his character. Most of the leadership literature does tell us to know our deficits, our gift-deficient areas. But it usually tells us to surround ourselves with a team of people with complementary gifts. That is certainly helpful, if you can pull it off. But even if you can, that is not sufficient, for your gift-deficient areas will undermine you unless there is compensatory godliness. What do I mean?

1) You may not have strong public speaking gifts, but if you are very godly--your wisdom and love and courage will mean that you will be interesting. 2) You may not have strong pastoral or counseling gifts (e.g. you may be very shy or introverted, etc.), but if you are very godly--your wisdom and love and courage will mean that you will comfort *and* guide people. 3) You may not have very strong leadership gifts (e.g. you may be very disorganized or very cautious by nature), but if you are very godly--your wisdom and love and courage will mean that people will respect *and follow you*

b. The case put negatively.

Character is primary, because there is enormous pressure in the Christian ministry towards hypocrisy. Christian leadership in all its aspects means you have to tell people every day, "God is **so wonderful!**" This usually is not something you have to do **daily** in other walks of life. But in the ministry, you have to be pointing people in one way or another to God to show his worth **and** beauty.

**But** seldom will your heart be in a condition to say such a thing with **integrity**. You then have two choices. Either, 1) you have to have to watch your heart far more closely, warming it up continually so you can preach to people what you are practicing, or 2) you put on a "ministerial" face and air and become something on the outside that you are not on the inside. Kuyper somewhere said that Phariseism is like a shadow--it can be deepest and sharpest closest to the light.

Therefore the ministry polarizes people. It makes them far better or far worse Christians than they would have been otherwise, but it will not leave you where you were! There are enormous pressures in the ministry on your integrity and character.

Don't *let* the *pulpit* drive you to the word. but *Let* the word drive you to the pulpit.

Prepare the preacher more *than* you prepare the *sermon*.

## 2. The "Grace"-operation of the Holy Spirit *and* preaching.

**Real** spiritual maturity combines qualities of character which cannot be united in the natural man apart from the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This is the theme of Jonathan Edwards masterful discourse, "The Excellency of Jesus Christ".<sup>72</sup> There Edwards claims that there is an striking and "admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ." He shows Jesus combines infinite majesty and glory, yet the lowest humility and meekness. He combines infinite justice yet boundless grace. He combines absolute sovereignty and dominion. yet perfect submission and obedience. He combines transcendent self-sufficiency, yet entire trust and reliance upon the Father. He is the Lamb and the Lion of God, proclaims Edwards. Approach him as the Lamb of God. and he will become a Lion for you, defending you. But reject him as the Lamb of God. and he will become a Lion against you. "Kiss the Son. lest he be **angry**, and ye perish in thy way."

Now it is no coincidence that. in Western literature and thought. the ideal hero and man has always been one who is both gracious and kind. yet bold and strong. In Sir Thomas Malory's ancient history of King Arthur. Sir Ector says of Launcelot. "Thou wert the meekest man that ever ate in **hall** among ladies: and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."<sup>73</sup> C.S. Lewis. an expert in medieval literature, explains that was the Christian ideal of knighthood.

*"The important thing about this ideal is, of course, the double demand it makes on human nature. The knight is a man of blood and iron, a man familiar with the sight of smashed faces and the ragged stumps of lopped-off limbs: he is also a demure, almost maidenlike, guest in hall, a gentle modest, unobtrusive man. He is not a compromise or happy mean between ferocity and meekness: he is fierce to the nth and meek to the nth...What is the relevance of this ideal to the modern world? It is terribly relevant.. the Middle Ages fixed on the one hope of the world. It may or may not be possible to produce by the thousand men who combine the two sides of Launcelot's character. But if it is not possible. then all talk of any lasting happiness or dignity in human society is pure moonshine."*<sup>74</sup>

Lewis shows in his **essay** that it is not possible for human nature to combine these two sides. Lewis knew that only as the Holy Spirit reproduces the excellency of Christ. can this human **ideal** be realized--the **man** of humility and power, of justice and grace. of authority and compassion.

What does this have to do **with** preaching? Everything. It is the secret of the power of **all** the great preachers. People could see in them the startling and striking union of both love/humility/gentleness and power/authority/courage.

The **sermons** and biographies of Spurgeon. Whitefield. and M'Cheyne reveal this character. There **was** a compassion. even a weakness and vulnerability about them. They were

<sup>72</sup> **Works**, vol. I, pp. 680ff.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Thomas Malory. Le Morte D'arthur (1485), XXI, xii.

<sup>74</sup> C.S.Lewis. "The Necessity of Chivalry" in Present Concerns (Fount. 1986), p. 13.

transparent, willing to talk about their own frailty, able to show their concern and love and even anxiety for their people. Yet they thundered away with towering authority as well.

No better example of this can be found than in the apostle Paul. His impact on the Thessalonians, for example, flowed out of his character. Read I Thessalonians 2, in which Paul recounts his ministry among them. First, there was an intensity, a courage born of urgency. Paul "appeals" (v.3) to the Thessalonians and he "dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition" (v.2). We sense a solemnity and kind of nobility which commands respect. But the solemnity has no pompousness or crankiness to it, because there was a humility. "We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else." (v.6) "We worked day and night not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." (v.9) Paul was not self-conscious nor a glory-seeker. He is remote from self-importance. Also evident was honesty, a directness and plainness of speech. ("You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed." -v.6), and affection ("But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." -v.7-8).

It is when a preacher has this same loving boldness that his preaching will be accompanied with power. This beautiful Christian character cannot be hidden or faked. Everything about a man's carriage and spirit (as well as his words and gestures) reveals these qualities. John Stott enumerates them as sincerity and earnestness (defined as "meaning what you say" and "feeling what you say")<sup>75</sup>, courage and humility. In two excellent chapters he discusses how critical it is for the preacher to clearly exhibit these traits in order to be a persuasive speaker. These go beyond words and gestures and even audience adaptation. They are the Personal Aspect of preaching.

In summary, a good preacher will combine warmth and force. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, I believe all of us tend naturally to incline toward being mainly warm and gentle or mainly forceful and authoritative in the pulpit. We must recognize our imbalance and seek the Lord for growth into the fullness of his holy character.

## B. THE "GIFT"<sup>w</sup>-OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PREACHING.

### 1. *Spiritual gifts and preaching.*

Having stated the most important matter--that the preacher must exhibit mature, godly character--it remains to mention that preaching styles nevertheless differ, because of the diversity of gifts.

I am not sure there is a simple gift of "preaching". The classic Greek words for proclamation are not in the "gift-lists" of the New Testament. (Unless you want to talk of 'prophets' in Eph.4:11--but let's not!) 1 Peter 4:10 seems to talk of a 'speaking' gift, but the word is so general that it is better to understand him as referring to a category of gifts. (He is perhaps dividing the gifts into gifts that involve 'word' and gifts that involve 'deed'.) Therefore, anyone called to preach comes with a different configuration of gifts. One with an evangelistic gift will preach differently than one with a teaching gift. (Though all preachers must evangelize and teach, not all preachers have all the gifts, and so they will do so with different degrees of emphasis and effectiveness.) One with the gift of exhortation may be more of a "counselor" in the pulpit than one with the gift of teaching, and so on. Thus it is very dangerous for a young preacher to seek to emulate exactly the preaching style of a particular great preacher. Of course, this is to a great degree unavoidable. It is natural to do imitation until you find your

<sup>75</sup> J. Stott, Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century (Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 273.

own 'voice'. But beware--unless your gift-mix matches perfectly that of his model, the imitated style will appear forced.

#### Notes from an old preacher's notebook.

The "Existential" aspect of preaching has historically been primary in evangelical discussions of preaching. But today, in our "how-to" culture, preaching texts major on details of preparation, structure, and delivery. But it was not always so. The following are a series of directions from an old Puritan's notebook. Banner of Truth Magazine published them under the heading "Sermons--How to Prepare and Deliver Them."<sup>76</sup> Below are some of the prescriptions for preachers:

"5. Be sure you eye **God**, his glory, the good of souls; having the day before mastered self and man-pleasing...

7. Look to your [emotions] most carefully that they not be (1) feigned, nor (2) forcedly let loose to have their full scope; for then they will either overrun your judgement, or be a temptation to vain glory...

8...look on the most [affected] faces in the assembly: let them know your preaching is a real talking with them, whereby they may be provoked, as it were, to answer you again....

13. Be sure you feed yourself, on every pause with the people, before you pass it: else that will do them little good, and you none at all. Oh, taste every bit..

19. Be always upon that subject which is next to your heart...it will stink like kept manna if reserved through distrust till next day...

23. Do not conceive that your zeal or earnestness will prevail with the people: but the force of spiritual reason, the evidence of scripture, and the power of the Holy Ghost."

It is clear **that**, in the past, our fathers were not so concerned with how to become a good preacher, but with what kind of man is a good preacher. They were wiser than we.

## 2. The Spirit's Anointing and preaching.

Finally, when we say there is an existential aspect to preaching, we are saying that there is no preaching without the power of the Holy Spirit operating in the minister.

### a. Scriptural basis.

Luke 1:15ff.- "[John the **Baptist**] shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before **him** in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to **the** wisdom of the just."

Luke 4:18 - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor..."

Acts 1:8 - "**But** you **will receive power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria**, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 2:4 - "All of **them** were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak**..." 4:8 - "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said..." 4:31 - "They were **all** filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" 7:55 - "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit...saw the glory of God...he

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<sup>76</sup> Banner of Truth, pp. 21-22.

said. 'I see the heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'..."13:9 - "Then Saul...filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elyman and said..."

I Cor. 2:3-5 - "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message was not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." cf. 4:19-20 - "I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power."

Col. 1:28,29 - 'We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom...to this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me.

I Thess. 1:5 - "because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction..." cf. II Cor. 10:3-5 - "...the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds: casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God..."

#### b. How the Holy Spirit Operates in the Preacher.

Many Reformed preachers put tremendous stress on sermon preparation and then they virtually read their sermon, forgetting that He can continue to create the sermon during the preaching! On the other hand many other evangelicals seem to think it is "unspiritual" to prepare and study, as if the Holy Spirit can't operate in the pastor's study before the moment of delivery.

#### He operates in the study, while preparing.

1. Through providing knowledge. (I Cor. 2: 11-14; I John 2:20) In studying the Scripture. He can assist you to "behold wondrous things". There can be a significant, **even tremendous** clarity in the study which later is not there in the pulpit, showing this to be a separate, necessary operation of the Spirit. You must cry for light and for preaching themes. You must taste a truth before you can feed it to others.

2. Through providing wisdom. In selecting the most applicable **truths** to the people takes not just mental clarity but also knowledge of human hearts. This operation of the Spirit may come in the study and/or in the pulpit itself. When you continually are told by listeners, "I thought you must have been eavesdropping on me all week! That sermon was just for me!", you know the Spirit is **working**.

3. Through prayer. (See Section B. Below)

*"Abundant prayer must go with earnest preaching. ...The habit of prayer is good but the spirit of prayer is better...As a rule, we ministers ought never to be **many** minutes without speaking to God **and** that not as a duty but as an **instinct**..." (Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 196).*

No **true** compassion for our people **will** be evident in preaching unless there is a spirit of supplications for them all week.

#### He operates in the pulpit, while preaching.

1. Through providing spiritual freedom. What is this? First, it is an ease of verbal expression. "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is the difference between **the** lightning bug and the lightning". There is an ease in finding the right verbal channels for your thoughts and feelings. And yet, at the same time, the Spirit also provides a wise restraint. Those of us with the dangerous gift of humor, those of us from a rough, coarse background, those of us **from** a different culture than the hearers, need to be careful here. The Spirit helps us.

2. Through providing spiritual clarity. The preacher finds his thinking of deep subjects becoming crystal clear. In fact, his whole mind can become extremely nimble and able to process a lot of information at once.

*"I once counted eight sets of thoughts which were going on in my brain simultaneously. I was preaching the gospel with all my might. but feeling for a lady who was evidently about to faint...I was wondering if A felt my rebuke, **and** praying that B might get comfort..." (Spurgeon, Lectures to my Students, p. 193)*

3. Through providing spiritual devotion. The preacher is kept consciously before God. When Elijah spoke before hostile **Ahab**, he said he stood before the Lord. The Spirit removes the sense that we stand before a congregation. It becomes a small thing to be judged by them (cf. I Cor. 4). The Spirit enables the preacher to experience the holiness or love, or wisdom of God so he can describe what he knows.

*"He can **make** you feel your subject till it thrills you, **and** you become depressed by it so as to be crushed into ~~the~~ earth, or elevated by it so as to be ~~borne~~ on eagles wings; making you feel besides your subject, your object, till you **yearn** for the conversion of men...at the same **time**... you desire that God may be glorified through the truth which you are delivering. You are conscious of a deep sympathy with the people..." (Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 1921)*

*"How does one know? It gives clarity of speech, ease of utterance, a great sense of authority **and** confidence as you are preaching, an awareness of a power not your own thrilling through your whole being, and an indescribable sense of joy... when this happens you have a feeling you are not actually doing the preaching, you are looking on." Elsewhere he says there is a difference between the exhilaration of ego, when you sense the approval of people, and the thrill of the Spirit's work. When the Spirit anoints you, you feel quite small and unimportant.<sup>77</sup>*

4. Through providing spiritual effect. The preacher is entirely dependent on the Spirit for **any** lasting effect. You may do accurate exegesis and compose a perfect sermon in terms of illustrations and structure, but it may be a display of sword **play** skill instead of any real wounding or surgery on the people. Some of us have enough natural ability **intelletually and** rhetorically to always bring a favorable, even enthusiastic response from the congregation. This is no substitute for our **real aim**, miracles of grace.

#### c. How to encourage rather than quench preaching in the Holy Spirit.

1. Through personal holiness of life rather than artificiality. We saw that John Stott **calls** this the **mark** of "sincerity". The **willingness** to suffer for what **we** believe, a naturalness of **style** (not a posturing, put on **ministerial** tone), and consistency of life are the marks of this sincerity.

2. Through **whole-heartedness** rather than distraction. This is a matter of the **will**, though it has to do **with** the **mind and** heart.

*"How few **ministers** preach with all **their** might? Alas, we speak so drowsily or **gently**, that sleeping sinners cannot **hear**...O Sirs, **how** plainly, **how** closely **and** earnestly should we deliver a message of such a nature as ours is, when the everlasting life or death of men is concerned in it..What! speak coldly for God..? **Such** a work as preaching for men's salvation should be done with all our **might**--that the people can feel us preach when they **hear** us" (Baxter, Reformed Pastor, p. 110)*

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<sup>77</sup> Lloyd Jones, Preaching and Preachers, p. 3

3. Through courage rather than self-consciousness. Do you preach for approval? Do you preach to get patted on the head? Do you preach only the doctrines people like? Read II Timothy, which is about courage in preaching. Systematic exposition is good for the backbone-- it will take you to truths that are unpopular with the world and/or Christians!

4. Through humility rather than pride. A requirement for power is the willingness to let the Scripture search you. This entails an openness to learn rather than rigidity and prejudice and a simplicity of heart. You must seek an ability to stand under the injunctions of the Word even as you preach them.

5. Through weakness rather than strength. Paul said. "for Christ's sake I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ can rest upon me. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

There it is, preacher. Go and learn what that means and you will be a mighty minister of the Word. How can you glory in your infirmities? This is a discipline by which you constantly remind yourself of what you are in yourself. It is a desperate dependence on the Spirit for effect--complete lack of confidence in your natural abilities. But along with this desperation is the joyful freedom that comes from knowing nothing rests on your eloquence, your wisdom, or your ability. Nothing ever has! Every success and blessing and fruit you have ever born has been from Him.

Tremendous freedom comes when we can laugh at ourselves and whisper to Him, "so! it's been you all along!" That day will be the beginning of your career as a preacher.

## C. THE PREACHER'S PRAYER LIFE

1. Method in Prayer: Below (in the Appendix) we outline a simple way of 'fellowship with God'. Rather than simply studying our Bibles and praying in a merely cognitive way, our 4-fold outline included the discipline of a 'middle' practice ("meditation") between Bible reading and prayer as well as the expectation of a final practice ("contemplation") that is the fruit of all we do. The method:

Reading (Listening) - Slow, gentle reading of Scripture repeatedly, looking for things not seen, appreciated, or enjoyed before. Listening for God's voice and stopping to taste the truth as it goes by. Write down main things learned.

*discipline* - Meditation (Reflecting)-Take each and **think out**: "How can this lead me 1) to adore God? 2) to confess sin? 3) to petition for grace? And 4) how is Jesus the ultimate a) revelation of this attribute. b) solution for this sin. c) source of this grace?"

Prayer (**Speaking**) - After meditation (or as soon as you become engaged) pray meditations: 1) adore God. 2) repent for sin. 3) **thank** for Christ. 4) ask for **aid**. Then 5) move on to 'kingdom prayer' for individual, church, and world needs.

*discipline* - Contemplation (Sensing) - Not as much a fourth 'stage' as the fruit of the rest. It is a spiritual sense on the heart of the reality of God. It can mingle with **the** other practices or come in strong and displace them. Essence--an adoring gaze at Him. It is at bottom a gift.

(Only) if you have learned to do this over longer stretches, eventually you can do the entire method in a very short time--even 5-10 minutes. Best **example**: a **familiar Psalm**.

### 2. Understanding Meditation

Meditation and Lectio Divina- "Divine Reading"

"Lectio Divina" is *formative* reading of the Bible rather than informative reading.



- a. Informative reading aims mainly at breaking things down and analyzing it (e.g. "what does this mean? what does this word mean? how does this word effect the rest of the sentence?")  
Formative reading aims mainly at putting things together, seeing connections (e.g. "that's me!" "what would I be if I really did this?" "what kind of God would say this?")
- b. In informative reading, you examine and ask questions of the text. In formative reading, the text examines and asks questions of you.
- c. Informative reading aims at taking in lots of facts and data--it may move rapidly, picking up information. Formative reading, however, is slow reading. It aims at *sensing* rather **than** simply at informing. (e.g. "That's wonderful!" "That is sweet to the taste!" "That hurts!" "That's beautiful!") Thus formative reading is called *Lectio Divina* "divine reading".
- d. Formative reading, of course, is much more effective if it follows informative reading. The more you understand the text. the more you can stand under it. It is hard to "sense" a truth if you **find** it confusing or opaque. or if you don't see the richness of meaning in it. In **summary--** you can do informative reading without formative, but you can't do formative reading (well) without first doing informative. Note: **Formative** reading is not simply an effect of informative reading. Often formative reading elicits new deeper understanding of a text's thrust which in turn leads for new informative reading.

#### Definitions of Meditation

*To [meditate] is to descend with the mind into the heart. and there to stand before the face of the Lord ever-present, all seeing, within you." Theophan the Recluse*

*"The mind must as it were, descend into the heart and then **the** whole soul ascend to seek for and gaze upon the majesty of God." Peter Toon*

*"By solemn or stated meditation, I intend the thoughts of some subject spiritual and divine, with the fixing, forcing, and ordering of o w thoughts about it. with a design to affect o w own **hearts and souls** with the matter of, of the things contained in it By this design it **is** distinguished from the study of the word, wherein our principle aim **is** to learn the truth, or to declare it unto others; and so also from prayer. whereof God himself **is** the immediate object. But it meditation it **is** the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight. and humiliation." Richard Baxter*

*"I pray that out of his glorious **riches** he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith And I pray that you. being rooted and established in love. may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Eph 3:16-19*

*"I keep asking that **the** God of o w Lord Jesus **Christ** the glorious Father, may give you **the** Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray also that **the** eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power toward us who believe." Eph 1:17-19*

To bring the truth of **God into** contact with the center of one's being until the Triune God and **all his** Word become real to you so that you seek him.

**Thinking a truth** in and **thinking** a truth *out* until the ideas become 'big' and 'sweet'. moving and affecting. **and until** the reality of God is sensed upon **the** heart.

**Meditation** is strictly speaking neither the Bible nor prayer but rather is the Bible turning to prayer.

#### Descriptions of Meditation

"The difference between my present practice and my former is this. Formerly, when I arose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer...But what was the result? I often spent...even an hour on my knees before having been conscious to myself of having derived comfort or humbling of the soul, and often after having suffered much from wandering thoughts...

I scarcely ever suffer in this way now...I began to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning...searching, as it were, every verse to get a blessing out of it...not for preaching (to others), but for obtaining food for my soul. After a few minutes my soul had been led to confession or thanksgiving, or intercession. When thus I have been for a while...I go to the next words of the verse, turning all as I go into prayer, as the Word may lead to it but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul as the object of my meditation...It often astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point"

George Muir (1805-1898), a Christian leader chiefly known for the orphanage he founded, and for his spirituality. *Soul Food* (London, 1897)

"I...used to spend abundance of time, in walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation soliloquy and prayer....I very frequently used to retire into a solitary place, on the banks of Hudson's River, at some distance from the [New York] city, for contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God: and had many sweet hours there....

"I had then and at other times, the greatest delight in the holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light, exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing ravishing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading. Used oftentimes to dwell long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it: and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders....

"I...found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations, in...a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns of this world, and...fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone...sweetly conversing with Christ and wrapped and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul, that I know not how to express....  
--Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) 'Personal Narrative' in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (Yale Press)

### 3. Understanding Contemplation

Teresa of Avila-

General description: a) A sense of the reality of God's presence, b) a great assurance of belonging to God, c) the soul becomes **much** more passive than active. d) it is indescribable. e) physically affecting at the **time**, and f) character-changing thereafter. General method: Though it **may** begin with words of adoration, it is essentially a move to wordless gazing and admiration. Stop analytical meditation when this happens. Levels:

*Infused contemplation* - a) ability to gaze. b) ability to rest, c) ability to delight.

1) *Prayer of Quiet* - Mental distractions recede. (ability to gaze)

2) *Prayer of Union* - Desire for **sin/other** objects recede. (ability to rest)

3) *Prayer of Conforming Union* - Spiritual ecstasy, but the 'wound' of beauty.

*Prayer of Transforming Union* - Spiritual ecstasy, and the healing of the wound.

Welsh Revivals -

"**One Friday** night last sprung, when praying by my **bedside**. I seemed to be taken up to a great expanse...it was communion with God. Before this I **had** a far-off God... After this **experience** I was awakened...a little after one o'clock...I was taken up into divine fellowship for about four hours. What it **was** I cannot tell you, except that it was divine." -- **Evan Roberts** (1904)

"June 18th, 1735, being in secret prayer, I felt suddenly my heart melting within me, like wax before the fire, with love to God my Savior. I felt not only love and peace, but also a longing to be dissolved **and** to be with Christ; and there was a cry in my inmost soul, with which I was totally unacquainted before, it was this--Abba, Father! Abba Father! I could not help calling God my Father; I knew now I that I was his child, and that he loved me; my soul being filled and satiated crying. 'It is enough--it ~~is~~ enough--I am satisfied; give me strength and I will follow thee through fire and water,'...there **was** in me 'the love of God shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost' (Rom.5:5)" -- **Howell Harris (1735)**

#### **Pascal and Edwards -**

*In the year of grace 1654 Monday 23 November, the day of St Clement. Pope and Martyr...from about half-past ten in the evening till about half **and** hour after midnight FIRE God of Abraham. God of Isaac. God of Jacob. Not of the philosophers and the learned. Certainty. Joy. Certainty. Emotion Sight Joy. Forgetfulness of the world **and** of all outside of God The world **has** not known thee, but I have known thee. Joy! Joy! Joy! **Tears of joy.** My God, will you leave me? Let me not ever be separated from you.*  
--Blaise Pascal

*Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly had been to **walk** for divine contemplation and prayer. I had a view that for me **was** extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God **and** man and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared was so calm and sweet--it appeared **also** great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to **swallow** up all thought and conception...and I continued in this state near as I can judge an **hour**: which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated, to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone, to love him with a holy and pure love: to trust in him: to live upon him: to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly made pure with a divine **and** heavenly purity, I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which **have** had the same affects.*

--Jonathan Edwards.

#### **Biblical Sources**

##### **Psalm 27:4**

*"This spiritual and divine light is.. a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, **and** a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising.... There is a twofold knowledge of good of which God **has** made the mind of man capable. The first, that which is merely notional...and the other is, that which consists in the sense of the heart, as when the heart is sensible of pleasure and light in the presence of the idea of it. In the former is exercised merely...the understanding, in distinction from the... disposition of the soul. Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the Loveliness **and** beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind" - J.Edwards*

**Rom.8:15-16; John 16:13-15 (cf. John 14:21-23; 2 Cor.3:17-18)**

*Both Rom.8 and John 16 speak of truth. In Rom.8:16 our 'spirits' already know that we are the children of God. In John 16 the apostles already have Jesus 'words'. But the promise is that the Holy Spirit will come into our hearts and illuminate what we already know. Contemplation*

results when the Holy Spirit comes and makes something objectively real into something that is also subjectively real to us.

#### WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER?

##### Describing/Defining.

--Peter Toon, Anglican author: "*Contemplation is...the attention of the whole soul upon God...The whole inner self is quiet and still and looking only unto God in a state of utter reverence, total admiration, and whole-hearted worship and adoration*"

--Jordan Aumann, Catholic writer: "*Contemplation signifies knowledge accompanied by delight.... that ...arouses admiration and captivates the soul.*"

--Richard Foster, Quaker author. "[Contemplation] is a matter of receiving rather than trying."

It may begin with words of praise and adoration, but it essentially moves beyond words and analysis to intuitive 'big picture' grasps. So you see to quietly gaze and admire--not analyze. *I still think the prayer without words is the best--if one can really achieve it But I now see that in trying to make it my daily bread I was counting on a greater mental and spiritual strength than I really have. To pray successfully without words one needs to be 'at the top of one's form.'*"  
-- C.S.Lewis, in Letters to Malcolm

*"The soul should not stay in meditation, for by its fidelity in mortification and recollection, it ordinarily receives a purer and more intimate prayer...consisting in a simple looking or loving attention to...God himself. The soul quitting reasoning, uses sweet contemplation, which keeps it peaceful, attentive, receptive of any divine impression the Holy Spirit may communicate."* -- Jacques Bousset (1627-1704). A Short and Easy Way of Making the Prayer of Faith

#### 4. Stages of Prayer

Once we begin to pray in this way, we inevitably discover that we have commenced a true spiritual "journey". Coming into the presence of God is often likened to the ascent of a mountain (Psalm 24:3-6): 1) On the one hand, a 'mountain' v.3 was a source of clarity (vantage point), beauty, and security--this is what it is to find the 'face of God' v.6. 2) On the other hand, a mountain is ascended in stages in which clarity, beauty, and security increase in stages, and it is a struggle! You literally "wrestle" to the top of a mountain and thus the God whose face we seek is the God of Jacob, the wrestler (v.6). Not surprisingly, God shows Moses his glory on a mountain. In the famous chapters 33 and 34 we see Moses also wrestles for higher (or deeper) levels of fellowship with God. In Exodus 33:7-11 we are told that Moses had 'face to face' contact at the tent of meeting. Yet when he asks to see God's *glory* (v.18) he is told that to see God's face is fatal (v.20). What this means--that there is seeing his face and then SEEING HIS FACE! There are degrees of prayer and degrees of experience. In one sense, Moses was 'seeing his face' in a way that none of the other Israelites were, and yet, in another sense, he hadn't really seen the face of God.

Thus John of the Cross wrote a book called *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Both he and his mentor, Teresa of Avila wrote much about stages or 'mansions' along the way into the presence of God. These books are helpful and challenging in general ways. They show what we see in Moses and in so many of the Psalms--our prayer life is meant to **make progress**. The problem with any of these books is that we enter a very subjective area where there are no **firm** (Biblical) markers of stage to stage. Nevertheless, over the years, as I've read both the more experientially reflective Protestants (like Jonathan Edwards and Martin Luther) along with the Catholics, I **believe** it would be fair to lay out the following broad categories for the journey of prayer. I have deliberately refused to put names on these stages. There are *many* variations! However, the most basic prayer is based on 'Father-love', trust in our family standing. Soon, however, we are **into** dryness and we go on on 'King-love' what we owe him for who he is. Then we break through into 'friend love', a giving and receiving of personal **truth**. Finally there is 'spousal love' prayer--a deep and **indescribable filling** of the heart with utterly fulfilling love.

Text

Effect on Prayer

Effect on Character

Effect in Experience

FATHER

"Our Father" Vocal Prayer  
Matt 6:9ff.

Avoiding Sin

Peace of Conscience

'Vocal Prayer' was the spiritual directors' way to refer to most basic communication of praise, thanks, repentance, and needs to God on the basis of a family-relationship. That is prayer, as defined by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer. When we do vocal prayer (aloud or in our hearts) we are getting the spiritual 'minimum daily requirement'. It makes us think of God and orients our lives toward him. If we do it regularly, it makes it more difficult to sin by omission or commission. It also brings peace of conscience. Many of us are so prayer-deprived that we mistake this peace for real **experience** of God.

KING

"Be Still"  
Ps.46:10

Meditation

Humbling

Dryness: Begin to long  
then recollection: focus

Once a Christian recognizes the **possibilities** of fellowship with God, the first, **primary** new element in the prayer life is the discipline of meditation and reflection. But very often, the first result of this new determination **is** what John calls the "night of sense". We come (probably for the first time) to want God's face much more than we sense **it**. It becomes extremely hard to concentrate in prayer, and we get almost nothing out of it at all. Many (most) never get farther. John is quite helpful here. 1st, he distinguishes the 'dark night of sense' from depression or sickness. The dryness and darkness only happens in prayer--if you are going about **all** the time in despondency, there's something else going on. 2nd, he shows how the dark night is really **progress up the mountain**--he even calls it 'dry contemplation'. a) It helps seekers be certain they are looking for God, not experiences. You give up the idol of 'feelings' and come to just want God, in any way at **all**. b) In general, it is enormously humbling. Ps.46: 10--**Be still and** know that *I am* God--is **the key-note** of this **stage**. You are being humbled but not abandoned. Indeed you are being weaned from the mechanical 'busyness' of the typical quiet time and being **stripped** down to a speechless (you can't think) dependence on God's great grace alone. Newer Christians in particular need to see they tend to believe God loves them because they love *him*. This 'dark night' humbles us out of that kind of works righteousness. 3rd, he calls us to keep to some disciplined times and methods of meditation that force you away from completely academic Bible study. Just endure it and **go** through it. Cling to the **truth**, even if you feel no love. Remember it can be a greater act of love to pay attention and serve someone when our feelings not supporting our behavior. When this stage finally falls away, the first sign in the area of **experience** is called "recollection". It is an unusual clarity or focus. It is like turning around on the mountain and **realizing** for the first time you ascended and have some great vistas. "The truth begins to **shine**." Some truths you feel you knew a long time appear very vivid and alive. Illumination.

FRIEND

"Away!"  
Ps.6:8-10

Repentance Prayer

Self-knowledge  
Idol-identification

Sweetness: Begin to taste

As progress in made m prayer, some wonderful times are in store in which the mind becomes extremely collected **and** focused and God's truth becomes quite real to you. However, the new reality and dependence on God's grace often means that God can show you things about your own heart you have not **seen** before. It happens often that episodes in your life in the world might reveal to you depths of weakness **and** sin that you have not seen before. You weren't in **a** position to handle these--but now you are. **And** in prayer you process them. John of the Cross considered this **a** second 'dark night' which he called the '**night** of spirit' in which your idols and sins are more real to you than ever. Now you take the new **access** to God **and** assurance of his **infinite**, meritless grace and apply it to your idols. The **Puritans** called this 'mortification'--a deep repentance. It **means** to recognize the 'sins beneath the sin'--the idols of works righteousness (I'll be OK if people like me: I'll be OK if I am successful). Unlike the 'night of sense', which **many find** is only gone **through** once or twice, these times of repentance are **interspersed** with 'answering touches' from God, as is so often seen at the end of the Psalms (cf. Ps.6:8-10) **Kidner** notes how often despondent sounding Psalmists experience these times of sweetness and assurance. **Times** of sweetness and assurances of love come through and **tell** us he is with us. The new discoveries of your **specific** controlling sins **can** be a real token that **God** is working in your life and **can** be quite encouraging.

LOVER

"Witness"  
Rom.8: 16

contemplation

**Holiness**  
Idol-replacement

Quiet: Begin to know  
High Assurance of **Sonship**

**This** is Teresa's 'fourth **mansion**' and it also corresponds to the many high experiences of God **that** are widely reported in times of awakening and revival. Over the years, **Catholics** and Pentecostals have interpreted these **experiences** in accord with their theology, but I will do it in terms of Reformed Protestant theology. What people (see **J.Edwards**) describe here is more of a passive receiving than what is **experienced** 'lower down the mountain'. There is a consciousness of God's love which comes in very 'sensibly' and **does not appear** to be the same **as** the sweetness and **reality** that gradually dawns on you

as a result of your meditation. Like Rom 8:16 and 5:5 says, it is something 'infused' or poured in from outside--it is an addition to what your own spirit is saying. As Rom 8:16 says--it is high, immediate assurance of your sonship from the Holy Spirit. General description: a) there is a sense of the reality of God's presence. b) the soul becomes much more passive than active, receiving. c) it receives enormous assurance of belonging to God, d) it is basically indescribable, e) it may be physically affecting at the time. and f) it results in permanent changes in the life. This is also called the 'prayer of quiet'. Meditation and inward talking is not necessary, because the love of God is so 'visible' and real. See Screwtape Letter IV. These experiences **can** be "fleeting or prolonged, subtle or pronounced"; It is possible to get 'hooked' on them--and begin to seek them rather than **God**. and you may even be subjected to some dryness to bring you back to the foundation of it all--**a** grasp of his free grace.

"Show Me" Glory Prayer

Turning Point

Union: Begin to see

Exod.33:18

"The World Sings to You"

Ecstatic or Abiding Joy

All the mystical authors--from Edwards to Lloyd Jones to the Catholic mystics. talk about increasing degrees of infused contemplation. It can differ in a) length (from sporadic to much more abiding) **and b)** degree. **D.M.Lloyd-Jones** had an experience one summer that changed his life forever, though he virtually never spoke of it. Edwards particularly was adept in describing these higher experiences as a rejoicing in God for his own sake--for the sheer beauty of who he is. JE believed true prayer moves beyond even gratitude--in which we **are** adoring **God** for how we have profited from God--to an aesthetic delight in who God is in himself. Thus we might have deep experiences of ecstatic joy over his sovereignty and holiness. In a famous 'Miscellany' on Holiness. JE says that when you are rejoicing in God for his own sake--"the whole world sings to a holy soul". You begin to appreciate everything in creation--not for what it profits or does for you. but what it shows us about the glory of God. Teresa divides these 'higher mansions' into another three or four but I have real doubts that it can be broken down so specifically. (But then--what in the world do I know???) From what I can tell. the 'higher' experiences more beyond the deep peace of knowing love into the joy of knowing his glory.

**Conclusion:** Notice 1) The 'key understanding' that moves us from one stage into the next is a greater grasp of the freeness of grace--of our justification and adoption. 2) The 'key practice' that moves us from one stage to another is just to keep on praying and seeking God rather **than** experience.

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## APPENDIX - DEVOTIONAL PLANS

## A. SIMPLEST PLAN FOR A DAILY QUIET TIME

*1. BIBLE STUDY. Goal: To understand the truth,*

First: Slowly read a paragraph or a chapter 3-4 **times**. When a thought or phrase or word captures your attention, pause for a moment and **thank** God for it. Then: Write down answers to any one of the following sets of questions. Don't try to do them **all** (though you may mix questions from different sets).

Set #1.

1. List what it tells about God or Christ.
2. List what it **tells** us about us or me.
3. List examples to follow or avoid  
    commands to obey  
    promises to claim

Set #2.

1. The key verse that impressed me.
2. Put verse in your own words.
3. What is the thought just before  
    the verse and just **after**?
4. Give **2-3** reasons it helped you.

Set #3.

1. What did you like?
2. What didn't you like?
3. What didn't you get?
4. How can you apply  
    what you learned?

*2. MEDITATION. Goal: To **sense** the reality of the truth in your heart.*

First: **Write** out one or two (at most!) of the **main** truths you got out of your Bible study. Then: For each truth, write out the answers to each of these questions:

If you have **little time--just answer the following:**

1. How would I be different if this truth **was** explosively  
    alive in my inner most being'?
2. Why is God showing you these particular things  
    today?

If you have **more time:**

Adoration: How can I praise God or Christ for what  
    this reveals about him? (Think of at least 2 or 3)

Confession: What wrong behavior, **harmful** emotions,  
    **false** attitudes **result** in me when I forget he is  
    like **this**? (Think of at least 2 or 3)

Thanksgiving: **Thank** God that you **are** saved by grace  
    through Jesus, not by your **performance**. How  
    can this grace in **Christ help** you overcome the sins  
    you just confessed?

Supplication: What do I need do or to become in light of  
    this? Ask him for it!

*3. PRAYER. Goal: To **see** God work in the world and in your life.*

First: pray **especially** for the things that came out of your meditation. Then: **Pray** through a  
prayer list of **things** to **ask** God for **regularly**.

**Praise** and **Thank** him for things you **saw** today.



Confess sins that you saw today.

New items for supplication you saw today

Add important ones to your prayer list.

Pray former items on your prayer list: for self, for family, for friends, for church, for the world.

Suggested passages to start:

John 1:1-14	Psalm 1
John 1:19-28	Psalm 4
John 1:29-42	Psalm 19
John 1:43-51	Psalm 32

## B. INTERMEDIATE DEVOTIONAL PLAN

Traditional evangelical Protestant spirituality is 'the Quiet Time': a) I study the Bible. I learn what the Bible teaches. b) Then I pray. I pray for God to help me do what I've learned, and I pray for the needs of my person, family, church, and world. However, many Protestants and Catholics realized that such a practice never gets us to the experience of God that the Psalmists aspired to, often had, and called others to (Psalm 27, 63, 84). The "secret" (if that is the right term) is discipline of a 'middle' practice (meditation) between Bible reading and prayer and the exuexatation of a final practice (contemplation) that is the fruit of all we do. Martin Luther clearly directs and discusses all four practices in A **Simple** Way to **Pray** while John of the Cross wrote: "Seek in *reading* (lectio) and you will find in meditation; knock in prayer and it will be opened in contemplation. (Sayings #158)

### I. Lectio: *Reading*

Description: *Lectio Divina* or "divine reading" sometimes refers to the entire 4 parts of prayer, but usually it refers to a devoted study and consideration of a text of the Scripture. **Its** goal is to personalize the word and to hear God speaking to you hear and now. Lectio assumes that you already understand the passage in a general way. If the text is confusing or opaque to you, you need to study it first. Lectio 'proper' means to read it gently and slowly, aiming more at aims at weighing and tasting the truth as it goes by.

Practice:

- If you have longer amount of time, *study* the text **first**. Outline the **text**. Then
  - If narrative passage, ask: 1) **What is the problem--what task is made difficult or threatened?** 2) **What is the resolution--how is the task completed?** 3) **What is the purpose of the story teller?**
  - If discourse passage, ask: 1) **What words/ideas are repeated or central--and why?** 2) **What comparisons or metaphors are used--and what do they show?** 3) **What cause-effect or general-to-particular relationships can be seen between clauses or paragraphs--and what do they teach?**
  - After either **kind**, ask: **What do I learn** 1) **about God or Christ:** a) **Who he is.** b) **what he's done.** 2) **about me or us.** 3) **about our salvation:** a) **cross.** b) **community,** c) **new creation.** 4) **about how we should live:** a) **examples to follow.** b) **commands to obey,** c) **promises to claim**
  - Look up difficult words or comments in reference material. Finally--outline it **again**.
- Then, do the slow 'spiritual reading'.
  - Prepare: Be aware of his presence: Seek full attentiveness: Know he wants to connect
  - Read slowly. When a thought or phrase or word captures your attention, you stop and dwell on it. Some things will 'resonate' or strike you or surprise you.
  - A good method: Repeat the **word(s)** or phrase over **an** over internally or out loud--staying with it till you've **drained** the new thought or sense you've just had. Then move on until another part engages you.

Confess sins that you saw today.

New items for supplication you saw to day

Add important ones to your prayer list.

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  - A good method: Repeat the **word(s)** or phrase over and over internally or out loud--staying with it **till** you've drained the new thought or sense you've just had. Then move on until another part engages you.

- Underline or otherwise note those parts that touched you as you read. You would also profit from reading the text this way at least twice and maybe more.

## 2. *Meditatio: Reflecting*

Description: Now in meditation, we take the 'radioactive'. Phrases, verses, and ideas and we now reflect on the truth deeply. The purpose is to bring the mind into contact with the heart so as to move into a deeper sense of God's (and his truth's) reality and presence. Meditation is not simply thinking, nor simply praying (see Ps 103): It is the descent of **mind with truth** into the inmost *heart*, until **whole** being yearns for God.

Practice:

- Method #1 - Choose 1-2 verses or sentences (from your *lectio*).
  - Go through the **text** repeatedly, each time putting the vocal emphasis on a different word.
  - Ask: "How does this emphasis bring out another aspect of truth? What particular truth does this word bring out? **What** would be different if the word was missing?"
  - Ask: "why is God showing me this now, today?"
- Method #2 - Choose 1-2 verses or sentences (from your *lectio*).
  - Teaching: What is the basic truth or teaching this conveys?
  - Adoration: How can I adore God for this? (**What** attribute does it show?)
  - Confession: What wrong thoughts, feelings, behavior happen when this is forgotten?
  - Thanks: How is Jesus the ultimate revelation of this attribute and/or the ultimate answer to this sin? How is this sin being caused by an inordinate hope for some-one or some-thing to give me the satisfaction that only Jesus can really give me?
  - Supplication: What do I need from God if I am to realize this truth in my life?

## 3. *Oratio: Praying*

Description: While *lectio* is listening intently to God, and *meditatio* is intently speaking to your own heart, *oratio* is turning back to God and speaking to him about what you are learning and hearing. Prayer after meditation is almost always more engaged at a deeper level of spiritual awareness. You begin with praying your meditations. Then (if allowed—see **below**) you can proceed to 'kingdom prayer' and petition for needs.

Practice:

- Pray "Adoration" back to him. Tell him what you love and adore about him. Visualize: how the world would be different if everyone saw this glory. **Yearn** for it.
- Pray "Confession" back to him. Admit what you have done, what you are. Visualize: What would you be like if this truth were explosively present in your life? **Yearn** for it. Have a "colloquy": Imagine God responding to your repentance in words of other Scripture.
  - Pray "**Thanks** for Christ" back to him. Remember some narrative from the life of Christ where he exhibited the trait you are thanking him for. Thank **him** for what he's done.
  - Pray "Supplication" back to him. Ask him for what you need to be and do what this truth **points to**. Now move on to more general kingdom prayer--asking for the "kingdom to come" in your own life. **in** the lives of people you know and love. in the needs and the **life** of the city and **the** world.

## 4. *Contemplatio: Sensing*

Description: Usually, though not always, during *Lectio* or *Meditatio*, or *Oratio*, there is an engaging and you **begin** to get a 'sense on the heart' of the cognitive **truth(s)** you are reflecting on. More moderate levels can be described as "sweetness" (**Ah!**) or "illumination" (**Aha!**) At the more profound levels (there seem to be several), you **experience** what **has** been called "infused contemplation" ('Infused' means 'given' or

'poured in' from outside.) General description: a) there is a sense of the reality of God's presence, b) the soul becomes much more passive than active, receiving, c) it receives enormous assurance of belonging to God, d) it can be indescribable, e) it may be physically affecting at the time, and f) it results in permanent changes in the life. See Ps.27:1; Rom.8: 15-16.

Practice: "Contemplation" is really a pure gift (as 'infused' indicates). The moments can happen anywhere in your time of devotion--or anywhere. It may be "fleeting or prolonged, subtle or pronounced". It can mingle with the flow of your meditation and prayer or even the lectio. Your God is passing by, **and** you aren't consumed because you are hid in Jesus. It is thus not completely proper to speak of "method except to say this: since it essentially a wordless gazing and **admiration**, don't try to stick to any scheme or method if it comes strongly. Luther said "when the Holy Spirit starts this--break off from your meditation routine. It is clarity-reality, an ability to rest, **an** ability to delight in his beauty for itself. I would "try" to contemplate at the very end of every devotional period, if it hasn't 'happened'. I simply try to gaze adoringly at what I've seen of him that day, without inner comment. But real contemplation is out of our control.

## C. AN ADVANCED PRAYER PLAN

When you have--

*One hour:*

Prep **and** Lectio - 30"

Meditation - 15"

Affective (short)and Contempl- 10"

Kingdom Prayer - 5"

*Two hours:*

Prep and Lectio - 60"

Meditation - 30"

Affective and Contempl - 20"

Kingdom Prayer - 10"

*Three Hours:*

Prep **and** Lectio - 75"

Meditation - 45"

Affect aContempl - 40"

Kingdom Prayer - 20"

*Evening Prayer (or Short) - 15-20" - stream prayer*

Adoration Psalm

Repentance Psalm

[Teaching Psalm]

Commitment

### PREPARATION:

Goal: 'Inner collectedness' 1) Realize **his** presence. 2) Gather your attention, 3) Ask for illumination.

#### How?

1. Pray an invocation verse.

a) tells me about God's presence, availability of fellowship or his desire for it:

Psalm 16:8; 27:4, 9-10; 40:16; 43:4; 63:1-3; 67:1; 84:5-7; 103:1-2; 139: 7-10;  
Matt. 11:28-30; John 4:23

b) Meditate--each word: 'what is the teaching?' 'what is the opposite?'

c) Pray it.

2. Re-collection.

a) Become aware of God's presence in the room.

b) Remember his worth, that knowing him now is more **important** than anything else that might distract or concern me.

c) **Reject/repent** of coming to him for any reason **exc** his own beauty.

d) Give **up: small** ambitions to be successful. **agenda/plans, worries/cares.**

e) **Ask** to attend to him fully.

f) Write distracting **thots** on a **notepad**; return to it after devotions.

3. Pray an illumination verse.

a) An illumination verse tells me about how God can enlighten, speak to me:

Ps.43:3; Ps. 119-any 3-4 verses! Eph. 1:17-19; 3:16-19; Rev.3: 19-20

### SPIRITUAL READING (Quickly):

Goal: Understanding. To learn the basic teaching (ask the text questions) But do it in his presence.

How? Slow reading and mark 3-4 times. Pause where something is sweet and thank God and taste it.

1. Observe: a) Longer texts. outline the text--identify parts w/titles. b) Shorter texts or chosen texts. paraphrase and/or emphasize each word.

2. Interpret: a) **Narratives:** (1) imagine perspective of characters. "If I was there. what would I have seen or felt?" (2) Ask: who (is it about)? what (is being done)? why (is it being done)? why is this here? b) **Discourse:** (1) ask what repetitions. **comparisons/contrasts**, cause-effects mean--why used? (2) visualize any comparisons which are **images/metaphors**. What do they **mean** e.g. to 'drift'. to be 'risen with Christ', to be 'light of the world', that 'rod comforts'? c) Both: where is this most unlike that which it is most **like** d) Optional: **Outline/paraphrase** again

3. **Distill** teaching: a) About who God is, b) what he does or *has* done, c) About who we are. d) what we should **be/do**--(1) **examps**, (2) **commands**, (3) **promises**: (4) **cross**. (5) **commun**. (6) **new creation**.

### MEDITATIVE PRAYER (Repeatedly):

Goal: Illumination. To listen to the Lord (let the text ask you questions).

How?

A. **Regular** - Choose one or two 'teachings':

1. Teaching- About who God is and what he's done: about who we are and what we should do?  
2. Adoration - How can I love and praise God on the basis of this? Pray the **truth/text** back to him.

3. Confession - How am I failing to realize this in my life? Confess the **truth/text** back to him.

4. Thanks - How is Christ the ult revelat of this and ult ans to this sin of mine? Thank him that he is.

5. Supplication- How does this show me what I should or can be and do? **Ask** him for it.

'Colloquy' - Speak to God about each and imagine (Biblically) his response to each.

B. At Length - Choose several 'teachings':

1. How can I love and adore God on the basis of this? What do I see here that I can praise him for? Have a colloquy--tell him. Pray the truth or best the **text** back to him. Listen! Write down what seems to be the likely response of God to what you say.

2. What can I confess to God on the basis of this? Visualize: What would I be like if this truth were **explosively** present in my life? What wrong behavior, harmful emotions, false attitudes result in me when I forget he is like this or has done this?

Have a colloquy--tell him. Pray the truth or best the text back to him. Listen! Write down what seems to be the likely response of God to what you say.

3. How can I thank Christ for how he is the ultimate revelation of this attribute of God and the **ultimate** answer to this sin or need of mine? Visualize: What is he **really** like if this is true?

Have a colloquy--tell him. Pray the **truth** or best the text back to him. Listen! Write down what seems to be the likely response of God to what you say.

4. What can I ask **God** to do in me and through me? How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

Have a colloquy--tell him. Pray the **truth** or best the text back to him. Listen! Write down what seems to be **the** likely response of God to what you say.

Transition: If the **affecting** experience ("sweetness") and insight experience ("seeing") proceeds. you are on the doorstep of **contemplation**. Simply sit **quietly** and enjoy God and what he has shown you. Don't ask--just admire and adore. If not proceed to repentance daily.

At **least** once a **week** do this 'at length.'

### AFFECTIVE PRAYER. (Differently)

Coal: Love, To take the affections of heart off of false objects and offer up the heart to the Lord.