



Communicating Christ

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Leader's Guide for Lecture #2

The Hands of a Christ-Centered Message

Goal of this Lesson: To understand how to interpret Scripture so as to communicate the Christ who is there.

I. Review of Previous Discussion:

- A. The moralistic/legalistic danger of “exemplary” messages (e.g., “The Menace of the Sunday School”):
- B. The necessity of a redemptive focus in all “Christian” messages:
- C. Identification marks of non-redemptive messages (“sola bootstraps” messages are identified by the “deadly ‘Be’s’ ”):

Be like Be good Be disciplined

[No Scripture, in context, says, “Only be good.” Such messages are not merely sub-Christian but anti- Christian]

<> Such messages inadvertently imply:

1. We are able to achieve self-sanctification.
2. Our acceptance with God depends on our conduct.
3. There is personal merit in moral behavior; contra . . .

- **Isaiah 64:6:** “All our righteous acts are like filthy rag.”

- **Luke 17:10:** “When we have done all we were commanded, we are still unprofitable servants.”

ROOTED IN GRACE FOR A LIFETIME OF MINISTRY

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- **Westminster Confession of Faith XVI. 2, 3, 5, 6:**

We cannot by our best works merit pardon for sin . . . ; by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have but done our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because, as they are good, they proceed from his spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment. . . . [B]elievers being accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unproveable in God's sight.

<> Our messages must be the Bible's; i.e., all is of grace—salvation and sanctification.
 “For from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things” (Rom. 11:36). It is up to every generation to **re-discover** grace because it is so easily obscured by the concern to gain holiness or to compel purity.

Babel occurs early in Scripture because it is never far from any of us.

Martin Luther, “The Sum of the Christian Life”:

It is exceedingly difficult to get into another habit of thinking in which we clearly separate faith and [works of] love. . . . Even though we are in faith . . . the heart is always ready to boast of itself before God and say: “After all, I have preached so long and lived so well and done so much, surely he will take this into account.” But it cannot be done. With men you may boast. . . . But when you come before God, leave all that boasting at home and remember to appeal from justice to grace. [But] let anyone try this and he will see and experience how exceedingly hard and bitter it is for a man, who all his life has been mired in his work righteousness, to pull himself out of it and with all his heart rise up through faith in the one Mediator.

I myself have been preaching and cultivating it (grace) for almost twenty years and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal so with God that I may contribute something, so that he will have to give me his grace in exchange for my holiness. Still I cannot get it into my head that I should surrender myself completely to sheer grace; yet [I know that] this is what I should and must do.

II. How to Develop Redemptive (i.e., Christ-Centered) Messages

A. Starting-point for Christ-Centered Messages: An FCF

(i.e., the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to, or for whom, the text was written that requires the grace of the passage, making legalistic/moralistic communication self-evident and self-defeating.)

How to Determine the FCF: 3-Step Process (Ask these things . . .)

1. What does the text say?

i.e., What's the Big Idea?!

2. What concern(s) did the text address?

i.e., What is the context?

3. What do we share in common with:
- those to (or about whom) the text was written
 - or
 - the one by who the text was written?

Examples of FCFs?

Note: Not all FCFs are sin, though all are a result of our fallen condition.

B. Determining the Distinctives of a Christ-centered Messages

1. What Does Not Characterize Correct Redemptive Interpretation of the Bible:

- a. Antinomian messages — disregarding the law of God, or the requirement of proper conduct in Scripture.
- b. Allegorical messages — making Christ appear in every Old Testament mud puddle or camel track through imaginative (allegorical) connections or word play. Leapfrogging to Golgotha.

2. What Does Characterize Correct Redemptive Interpretation of the Bible:

- a. Recognition of all of Scripture as one coherent history of God's redeeming work.
- b. All personages and events relate to this one history.
- c. Proper interpretation relates the pieces be related to the whole.

Greidanus: "In opposing the fragmentary interpretation which reads the Bible as a collection of biographies, the redemptive-historical side stresses the . . . unity of redemptive history. . . . The unity of redemptive history implies the Christocentric nature of every historical text. Redemptive history is the history of Christ: He stands at its center, but no less at its beginning and end. . . . Scripture discloses [its] theme . . . right at the beginning. Gen. 3:15 . . . places all subsequent events in the light of the tremendous battle between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between Christ coming into the world and Satan the ruler of this world, and it places all events in the light of the complete victory which the Seed of the woman shall attain. In view of this, it is imperative that not one single person be isolated from this history and set apart from this great battle. The place of both opponents and 'co-workers' can only be determined Christologically."

Key Organizing text for all the Bible: Genesis 3: 15.

The Proper Method Pictured

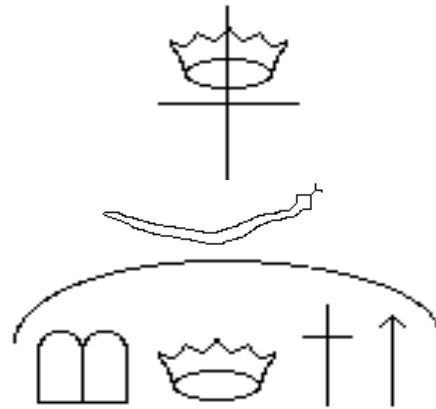
Not This:

Reminds me of:



Leapfrogging to the Cross

But This:



Where does this specific passage fit in redemptive history/teaching?

“[Scripture’s message] is simply the proclamation of the Divine crusade of redemption, of God’s way out of our human predicament [cf. FCF].”

— Simon Blocker, *The Secret of Pulpit Power*, 1955.

C. Mining the Redemptive Message from Any Biblical Passage:

A. Topical Approaches (well intentioned but with only human authority):

Redemptive truth creatively added to the topic at hand.

B. Expository Approaches (well interpreted and with Scriptural authority):

Redemptive Truth logically demonstrated in Scripture through:

1. Text, i.e., the text actually mentions Christ or his messianic work (e.g., Gospel account, messianic Psalm, epistolary reference, etc.).
2. Type, i.e., Christ’s redemptive work is represented in an Old Testament type (e.g., David, Joseph, the Temple, etc.).

3. Context, i.e., identifying where this passage fits in the overall revelation of God's redemptive plan.)

In its context every passage either is:

- a. Predictive of the Work of Christ
- b. Preparatory for the Work of Christ
- c. Reflective of the Work of Christ
- d. Resultant of the Work of Christ

New Lenses to See Redeeming Work Throughout Scripture:

1. What does this text reveal about God that provides redemption?
and/or
2. What does this text reveal about man that requires redemption?

Examples:

- Predictive of the Work of Christ

(Prophecies, Messianic Psalms, OT sacraments)

- Preparatory for the Work of Christ

Gal. 3:24: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Also, Gal. 2:6–9.)

Rom. 4:23–25: "Now it was not written for his [Abraham's] sake alone that it [i.e., righteousness] was imputed to him. But for us also, if we believe in him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification."

- Reflective of the Work of Christ (the most common tool of "redemptive" messages):

1. God's nature or attributes which provide the work of Christ*

Rom. 15:4: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Old Testament Narratives reveal God's justice, deliverance, sure promise, mercy, etc.
Genealogies showing faithfulness and grace.

2. Our nature or attributes which require the work of Christ*

Mark 7:6: “[Jesus said] ‘Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.’”

1 Cor. 10:5, 6 [Speaking of the wilderness wanderings of Israel]: “Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted . . . (leading to verse 13).

<> Note the poverty of truly good OT Patriarchs. Almost every OT saint is terribly flawed to show us everyone’s need of a Redeemer.

* May be historical conclusion or logical assumption, stated or implied.

- Resultant of the Work of Christ

Rom. 8:1, 2: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Phil. 1:12, 13: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work [completed action] in you to will and to do his good purpose.”

Heb. 4:14–16: “Seeing that we have such a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession . . . Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

III. What Redemptive Messages “Sound Like” (i.e., Dominant Themes):

Not “sola bootstrapsa” or the “deadly ‘Be’s’ ”

But . . .

1. Grace Despite our Sin (The Messages of Assurance and Adoption)

Typical topics:

Our comfort in God’s Love (Sabbath)

Our confidence of God’s Love (Sonship)

2. Grace Destroying the Guilt of Sin (The Messages of Justification and Forgiveness)

Typical topics:

Our Repentance

God’s Cleansing

3. Grace Defeating the Power of Sin (The Messages of Sanctification and Enablement)

Typical topics:

Victory over the world, flesh and devil

Provision of the H.S. and the Word enabling victory

4. Grace Compelling Holiness (The Messages of Worship and Obedience)

Typical Topics:

Thanksgiving, praise, gratitude

Loving service

<> It is this last topic that is often the telltale sign of Christ-centered messages. Historically, concerns for obedience cause the most debate because it is difficult to remove obedience as a qualification for grace without having some question whether you have removed obedience as a requirement for life. Consistently communicating the _____ and proper _____ for holiness may be the most difficult task evangelicals face.