

Preaching to Unsaved Church Members

By Jay Wegter

More than 200 years ago Welsh pastor Howell Harris described the spiritual state of the churches in Wales. His penetrating observations were poignant at the time but unbeknown to him; his comments have also proven to be descriptive of the condition of American Protestant churches today. In essence, Harris provides a definition of today's *easy-believism*: *Churches are filled with folks who have a détente with sin; they are at ease under its dominion. They won't study the fruits of faith or make their election and calling sure; but turn the grace of God into licentiousness* (Edward Morgan, *The Life and Times of Howell Harris*, Need of the Times Publishers, 1998 rp, p. 71).

In his works on the unconverted religious, Howell Harris dissects the heart of the false professor with surgical precision. Harris peels back the layers of formal religion to reveal a soul that is yet a stranger to the blood of Christ. As 21st century pastors, we have much to gain by immersing ourselves in the practical theology of our predecessors. These were men who never saw a light bulb or an automobile, yet they knew the hearts of men intimately; perhaps better than we do.

Out of desire to be faithful preachers of the Word at times in our preaching we are going to target unsaved churchgoers who attend services regularly. We might choose a text that addresses the cost of discipleship; or the lordship of Christ; or the meaning of true repentance. Certainly the Spirit of God is infinitely capable of using these biblical subjects to bring saving light into the soul of the unregenerate. But it is noteworthy that the preachers of the Great Awakening era camped frequently upon one great theme; the perfect suitability of the Savior for the sinner's ruin. It is only the destitute sinner who falls at the feet of Christ. Only those who been smitten with the *death wound* of damnation flee to the Savior, only those stripped of all self-righteousness cry to Christ for mercy. Only those whose enmity has been cast out by the blood of Christ enjoy experimental union with Christ.

Men of God of two centuries past saw the 'religious' unsaved as those who had *converted to Christianity but not to Christ*. Though outwardly moral and verbally orthodox, the false professor is without personal knowledge of Christ. This subject of being a stranger to Christ was the touchstone that permeated the messages of these divines when they addressed nominal Christianity.

Therefore it behooves us to know the defenses and machinations of soul that keep the door barred from faith and repentance. How can we preach over, under, and around the door if we do not know the reasons the false professor has so securely bolted the door against the Lamb of God? ***Our task is:***

One -- confront self-righteousness

To begin with, we must know that the unsaved 'religious' man has yet to receive a death blow from the law of God. The law has never been manifested to him in its *spirituality* (Rom 7:7-14). In other words, he has never been thoroughly slain by the law. If he had been he would be *dead to the law* as a source of life and would understand that he must find spiritual life in Another, in Christ (Gal 2:19).

As a consequence of being yet *alive to the law*, the idol of self is set up in the heart against Christ in His offices. The false professor feels that he is a good Christian BEFORE he is thoroughly condemned by the law. Only when the law slays him will he be made to feel his utter need of faith in order to lay hold of Christ's imputed righteousness (Ibid., p. 74).

The work of Christ opposes the false professor at every turn; for guilt can only be removed by Christ's bloody death—by law at work in Christ's propitiation. The sinner's guilt, which issues forth in *legal death* and *condemnation*, must be removed by law. Christ accomplished this removal of guilt through His atoning sacrifice. Propitiation is in keeping with God's law; for under the government of God Christ willingly became officially guilty of the sins of the elect (2 Cor 5:21).

It was by the giving of Christ's life that condemnation is removed from the believing sinner. By contrast, the unbelieving 'religious' man is still in a state of spiritual death (enmity—Colossians 1:21). His efforts to offset his condemnation fall short of resting in Christ alone (Thomas Wilcox and Horatius Bonar, *Christ is All*, Chapel Library, p. 3).

Believing upon Christ savingly is above the power of the natural man. The whole religious bent of man is to bring duties, humblings, and self-reformation to God in order to gain divine acceptance. But the Gospel proclaims that the sinner must receive all from God's hand. Everything in the sinner's pride is allied against sovereign grace. It's not an exaggeration to say that nature abominates the merits of Christ. The sinner would rather do anything than be saved by Christ alone; be obligated to Him and owe all to Him (Ibid., p. 21-22).

God's grace is free, but its bestowal has conditions which are set by the Holy Spirit; the Spirit prepares the sinner for grace by means of conviction (Jn 16:13). The burden of sin and wrath on the conscience is a function of divine grace BECAUSE Christ's merit is only known to the poor soul in deep distress. Small conviction of sin will yield only slight views of Christ's blood and merits.

Christ is not like us – He is so willing to forgive. Our methods of measuring mercy and grace are faulty; not a speck of self-improvement is acceptable to heaven. God does not grant His grace on the basis of *legal repenting* (legal repenting seeks to gain divine acceptance by means of personal reformation). Saving grace is not mixed with works (Ibid., pp. 23-24).

Nature can't stand being stripped of all righteousness. Nature would rather despair; would rather choose Judas' noose than go to Christ on His terms. "Be merciful to me the sinner" is the hardest prayer in the world. To confess Christ from the heart is above the power of flesh and blood. So much profession of salvation today is merely an accommodation, a *lowering of the market* to what the flesh is capable of; namely a form of religion in which men have never parted with self-righteousness. As a result carnal professors are strangers to the blood of Christ (Ibid., pp. 24-25).

There is a form of religion which only feeds Pharisaical spirituality. Nothing can kill self-righteousness but a real acquaintance with the Savior's poverty, humiliation, and death. False professors have settled into self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, and whole-hearted 'confidence' in their profession; but they will not come to the manger and adore their God and be saved by His humiliation alone (Morgan, pp. 204-205). A radical change of heart is needed – regeneration. There is a great danger in resting upon any superficial idea or impression of religion. Salvation cannot be obtained until we become one spirit with Christ; experience His resurrection and enjoy the benefits of His death by union with Him.

False professors are more naked, wretched, and poor than they can possibly imagine. They have never seen their own moral bankruptcy and spiritual ruin. They are responsible for *hating the light* (Jn 3:19-21). They seem ignorant of the fact that God only pities, forgives, and receives those who are *poor in spirit, self-condemned, broken-hearted, and sincere* (no man apart from the Spirit's work can *prepare* himself in this way; it is the Spirit's convicting work to harrow the heart until it is 'mortally wounded').

No one ever came to liberty without feeling himself in bondage. No man ever believed without discovering through an evil heart of unbelief that believing is the hardest thing in the world. No one ever took up the cross in self-denial without perceiving hell, darkness, and wrath pursuing him until fleeing to Christ as his only refuge (Ibid., pp. 257-258).

God's way is radically different from the "auto-soterism" inherent in modern evangelistic methods. God comes down and confounds the language of Babel; He scatters every stick and stone and pile of mortar. He does not leave one stone upon another. He is a jealous God, and will have no partner in the way of salvation (J. C. Philpot, *What is it that saves a soul?*, Chapel Library, p. 13).

Joshua's filthy garments must be taken away from him before he is clothed in clean raiment (Zech 3:4). Thus *killing* goes before making alive; *beggary* and the *dunghill* before the inheritance of the throne of glory; the *grave of buried hopes* and the *dust of self-abhorrence* before the exaltation to a seat among princes (1 Sam 2:6-8) (Ibid.).

When the quickening power of God's Spirit has passed upon a man's conscience, he is invariably brought to see himself to be morally and spiritually bankrupt. This inward sight of self cuts him off sooner or later from legal hopes. In many cases the work may begin in a way scarcely perceptible – but be sure of this, that the Lord will "bring down the hearts" of all His people "with labor;"—He will convince them of their lost state before Him and cast them as ruined wretches into the dust of death – without hope, strength, wisdom, help, or righteousness, except that which is given to them, as a free gift of distinguishing grace.

And this work of grace in the conscience, pulling down of all man's false refuges, stripping him of every lying hope, and thrusting him down into self-abasement and self-abhorrence, is indispensable to a true reception of Christ. No matter how informed his judgment is he will never receive Christ spiritually into his heart and affections, until he has been broken down by the hand of God in his soul to be a ruined wretch (J. C. Philpot, *The Heavenly Birth and its Earthly Counterfeit*, Chapel Library, p. 4).

Two -- expose Presumption

So many today in churches rest in their convictions but do not give evidence of the Spirit of God working in the will and the affections. No man marvels in God's distinguishing love unless he has received a deadly wound; by that wound the Spirit enables him to see that he must be damned unless covered by Christ's righteousness and unless Christ's nature is wrought in him.

There is inestimable danger in resting in convictions without life, love, fellowship with God and Christ and growth in the knowledge of Christ and self (Morgan, p. 76).

There is a natural love, faith, and humility in souls deceived into thinking that they are born again. Their natures are only outwardly changed and outwardly enlightened. Self-love still reigns. They are not convinced of the evil of secret sin. They have never perceived the deceitfulness of their natures; natures capable of putting on the appearance of grace, and complying with the outward form of religion.

It is possible to know Christ outwardly according to the flesh wherein there is a kind of love to Him, a kind of confidence in Him that is from natural and historical views of the Gospel (such as Balaam had). These persons looked on something they had done or felt and drew the conclusion they were saved. This is the religion of most professors. They formed a faith in themselves without going to Christ as a perishing sinner! They have never looked to Christ as to the *brazen serpent* (Jn 3:14-15); they never ran fleeing to Christ from the Avenger (Heb 6:18). Therefore they settled into a false confidence.

But notice what is foreign to them. They do not experience daily combat, victory of faith, feeding on the flesh and blood of the Savior, the mysteries of the God-man, His obedience of humiliation, His infinite riches, the wonders of His sufferings – these things are not delight for them but *speculation*; not the soul's food (Jn 6:54-56), but subjects of religious controversy (Ibid., pp. 179-180).

J. C. Philpot's riveting comments highlight the fact that salvation in Christ is an *internal reality*; where there is no experience of that reality, there is no salvation: As far as inward religion is concerned, a man must have salvation as an internal reality, as a known, enjoyed, tasted, felt and handled possession, or he will never enter the kingdom of heaven. He may be a Churchman or a Dissenter, Calvinist or Arminian, Baptist or Independent, anything or everything, and yet all his profession is no more towards this salvation than the cut of his clothes, the height of his stature, or the color of his complexion.

What is the everlasting love of a Triune God, unless that eternal love is shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit? (Rom 5:5). What is the final perseverance of the saints, unless there is blessed enjoyment of it in the conscience as a personal reality? To see these things revealed in the Bible is nothing. To hear them preached by one of God's ministers is nothing. To receive the truth of these things into our judgment and to yield to them in unwavering assent is nothing. Thousands have done all this who are blaspheming God in hell. But to have eternal election, personal redemption, imputed righteousness, unfailing love, and all the other blessed links of the golden chain let down into the soul from the throne of God; to have the beauty, glory and blessedness of salvation in all of its branches – past, present, and to come – revealed to the heart and sealed upon the conscience, this is all in all (J. C. Philpot, *What is it that saves a soul?*, p. 18).

Many speak of Christ who never came to Him as a lost sinner; their natural enmity has not been cast out. They are still "outer court" worshippers engaged in old covenant spirituality. Therefore we're going to be preaching to many who are *tares*; folks who have yet to have their hearts melted by the sight of Christ in a manger in our nature. They have never beheld Him crowned with thorns, opening not His mouth because He bore our sin and shame. The false professor has a secret enmity against the preaching of God's humiliation in the death of the Son of God (the theology of the "crucified God" does not ravish their souls). They are false professors content with false peace. They have overlooked their own sins; they have not been brought to the cross and the blood by a sense of their sin in order to see them done away with by Christ's punishment and blood.

They have but a superficial knowledge that cannot see our sins laid upon the Savior. Therefore they cannot feed upon Christ and His cross and receive comfort there. But where the new man is formed, the individual is not satisfied to hear of Him; he must have Him as the Pearl of Great Price; he must have the Redeemer upon whom he rests all of his hopes (Mt 13:44-46) (Morgan, p. 181-182).

Though professing faith in Christ; the unregenerate lies in a deep spiritual slumber of apathy. But spiritual complacency is foreign to the child of God. The child of God's grace is hungry for experimental righteousness and until his Lord returns he will watch against the uprising of lusts and thoughts which war against God and the soul (Gary Hendrix, *Professing Christians Warned*, Chapel Library). The flesh can never rise above hypocrisy. The religious flesh, even when dressed in the highest Calvinistic orthodoxy, can never rise above itself. There is no brokenness of heart, no contrition of spirit, no spiritual hope, no godly sorrow, no genuine humility, no living faith, and no heavenly love, "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit." No abasing views of self, no tender feelings of reverence towards God, no filial

fear of His great name, no melting of the heart, no softening of spirit, no deadness to the world, no sweet communion with the Lord of life and glory, ever dwelt in their breasts (J. C. Philpot, *The Heavenly Birth*, p. 8).

It was Bishop Ryle who said, *I look at the world and see the greater part of it lying in wickedness. I look at professing Christians and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn and I hear the Spirit saying 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Surely this text ought to make us consider our ways and search our hearts. Surely it should raise within us solemn thoughts, and send us to prayer.*

Three – unmask decisional regeneration

The teaching of “Decisional Regeneration” departs from Scripture because it attributes to man the ability to regenerate himself. The practice of “Decisional Regeneration” in the Church must be exposed in order to save men from the damning delusion that because they have “decided,” they are going to heaven and are no longer under the wrath of God (James Adams, *Decisional Regeneration*, Chapel Library, p. 3).

“You must be born again” (Jn 3:7) is the great doctrine of man’s need for regeneration in order to enter the kingdom of God (i.e., miraculous new birth). But the modern *born again movement* denies the very point that John 3 intends to teach. Simply stated, the error is this – *that men are born again as a result of something they do.*

Whatever requirement is put on the sinner the impression is given that sinful man himself is the one who brings about regeneration. We can and must tell men to turn from their sins and believe the Gospel, but in doing so we should realize that when a man does repent and believe, it is the result of God’s prior regenerative working within him. If this were not the case, if man were actually capable of initiating his own salvation, then it would be impossible to escape the conclusion that men do not need regeneration at all, but possess in themselves an innate goodness which causes them to seek after God – but Scripture puts this to the lie (Rom 3:10-12) (Richard Ochs, *Born-againism*, Chapel Library).

The purity of the Gospel is of extreme importance because it alone is the power of God unto salvation, and the true basis of Christian unity. Charles Hodge points out the danger of teaching decisional regeneration: *No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves, and repent and believe just when they please. . . As it is a truth both of Scripture and of experience that the un-renewed man can do nothing of himself to secure his salvation, it is essential that he should be brought to a practical conviction of that truth. When thus convicted, and not before, he seeks help from the only source whence it can be obtained”* (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids 1970, Vol. 2, p. 277).

Evangelistic methods employed in Evangelical Christianity have given rise to a policy of equating salvation with a profession of faith in Christ. The result is church roles filled with carnal professors whose daily lives are a contradiction of true piety (Gary Hendrix, *Professing Christians Warned*).

Among the multitudes of “decisions” that are made there are some genuine conversions. But with the passing of every week thousands are being counseled into false hope. When folks are counseled to pray a certain prayer and then pronounced “saved,” it commonly results in the deluding impression that the individual has been “regenerated” through a decision. Regeneration is reduced to a procedure which man performs. How differently did Jesus Christ deal with sinners. He did not speak with people with a stereotyped presentation; He dealt with every individual on a personal basis (James Adams, pp. 4-5).

False professors of Christ place their confidence in a “birth” that is of “the will of man” (Jn 1:13). Observes Philpot, man then it appears has a will to become religious; and taken up by ourselves, so the birth after the “will of man” shadows forth a religion put upon us by others. And to what does that great mass of the religion of the present day amount to? If we gauge it by the scriptural standard, if we look at it with a spiritual eye, if we examine it in its bearings God-ward, what must we say of the vast bulk of religion current in this professing day? Must we not say that it is according to “the will of man?” (Philpot, *The Heavenly Birth*, p. 8).

Looking unto Jesus is the quickened, vivified soul’s response to a crucified and risen Savior. Let us not forget that repentance is a consequent of faith in God’s free love to sinners; we are not saved FOR believing; faith is not a work. Do not make a savior out of your faith. We might well ask, “Is your hope of glory laid by the hand of Christ or by your own hand? Who began religion in you? (Wilcox, *Christ is All*, pp. 13-17).

Christ is only put on when our own covering is totally *unraveled*. No one really believes until he is an *undone sinner* – the hardest thing in the world is to take Christ alone for righteousness. To believe, one must have a clear view of conviction of sin, of the merits of Christ’s blood, and Christ’s willingness to save one merely as a sinner. All this is more difficult than to make a world; nature cannot attain to it.

The temptations of Satan center upon self-righteousness which keeps guilt and hardness of heart in place. A defiled conscience is only allayed by the blood of Christ. No one is truly heroic about facing his own depravity’s vileness UNLESS he totally trusts the merits of Christ’s blood (Ibid., pp. 19-20). It is Christ’s work to make you believe. Saving faith is a gift. Yet you are to mourn your unbelief; for unbelief sets up guilt of conscience *above* Christ and His merits. Unbelief fixates upon complaints against the self – whereas faith looks away from self to Christ (Ibid.).

The Gospel doesn’t calculate how guilty you are compared to other sinners. All are *shut up under sin* (Gal 3:22). The assured foundation laid up for the believer in the Gospel is commonly misunderstood by professors of faith. The Gospel is NOT a scheme to make up for deficiencies; the Gospel is addressed to those who are far from righteousness. It is addressed to the *poor, blind and naked*. Christ came to call sinners to repentance.

The true Gospel offends the pride of the hearer by putting all on the level of society’s outcasts. The Gospel is not a bargain or transaction which God proposes on certain conditions of acceptance. The gift of eternal life is not proffered to those who are able to meet certain conditions. No, the Gospel is a message of reconciliation offered indiscriminately to mankind (James Haldane, *The Revelation of God’s Righteousness*, Chapel Library, pp. 23-24).

Because of satanic blindness to the Gospel of grace (2 Cor 4:3, 4), unregenerate man cannot comprehend the true basis of salvation, and is therefore ever prone to do the best he knows how. This is to attempt to work out his own standing before God by his own efforts. It is the natural tendency to do something of merit; whether standing in an evangelistic meeting, or raising a hand, or walking an aisle. He may be persuaded to do all of the above when he has no conception of standing by faith on the Rock of Jesus Christ. He may come forward in a church and abandon his natural timidity when he knows nothing of abandoning his satanic tendency to self-help, and resting by faith on that which Christ has done for him (Iain Murray, *The Invitation System*, Banner of Truth, pp. 22-23).

Four -- proclaim the necessity of the Spirit's regenerating power

Only the Spirit's convicting power can slay self-help. The leprous doctrine of free will is destroyed in the heart of one who has had any spiritual dealing with Christ; for Christ is the One who in the exercise of His sovereignty applies His merits to the sinner (He reveals the Father, Matt 11:27 -- He is 'the Mediator of a better covenant' -- Heb 8:6). Christ is so infinitely holy that man's fallen nature dare not look upon Him in absolute reliance and believing surrender. The divine nature must be put into the soul in order to look upon Christ so as to lay hold of Him. No man apprehends Christ savingly but the one whom the Father draws (Jn 6:44) (Wilcox, p. 26).

Christ shows us in John 6 that the doctrine of human inability and sovereign election are not void of practicality. The truth of God's sovereign electing love is to be set before the born again so that God may have all the honor in our salvation. And God's electing love must be set before the Pharisee so that he might be humbled; for the un-humbled sinner erroneously believes that he can move the Great God to save him *because* he does so and so (Morgan, p. 86).

Is the professor's faith in the historical Jesus, or in "Christ the Son of the living God?" Matthew 16:17 the Lord told Peter that his response, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," did not find its source in flesh and blood but was the result of the Father's revelation. Peter had not arrived at his belief by mere reason: *flesh and blood* had not worked out the problem; there had been a revelation to him from the Father who is in heaven. To know the Lord in mere doctrinal statement, no such divine teaching is required; but Peter's full assurance of his Lord's nature and mission was no theory in the head: the truth had been written on his heart by the heavenly Spirit. This is the only knowledge worth having as to the Person of our Lord (Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Revell, p. 224).

The Apostle Paul's own testimony of personal salvation also includes the revelation of Christ. "But when it pleased Him, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach His Gospel among the Gentiles. . ." (Gal 1:15-16a). The outward and the physical would have never sufficed to convert Paul. The Apostle's testimony was in "*His good pleasure* He revealed His Son in me." It changed a man who was breathing *murderous threats* against Christ's church into one who breathed *doxologies* whenever he reflected on God's marvelous redeeming love to one so undeserving as himself.

The immediate purpose if this separation and calling is here said to have been "to reveal His Son in me." To *reveal* is to remove the scales from the eyes of the heart. Paul had been persecuting God's only begotten Son. God wanted Paul to see that the Jesus, whom in His disciples Paul had been persecuting, was indeed partaker of God's very essence, Himself God (William Hendrickson, *NTC*, pp. 52-53).

Many today believe in the historical Jesus who are ignorant of the character of God. The power of the Gospel is to give the knowledge of the glory of God (His true character) in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). Many trust in Christ precisely as the Jews did in Moses. This is another gospel; an historic Jesus, not the glory of God in the face of Christ. Those who hold to this gospel are strangers to the truth and are still in love with the world (James Haldane, *Revelation of God's Righteousness*, Chapel Library, p. 27). As a consequence of this *reductionist* gospel, many have devalued knowledge; as if we might become acquainted with God without having the heart affected by the truth. No, the knowledge of God produces the radical change; the entire change of the sinner's heart.

The knowledge of God is maintained in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. If God is our soul's portion then our continued enjoyment of such is due to our minds being enlightened in the knowledge of Christ. That knowledge is maintained by the Holy Spirit. Oh how great is our dependence upon God; the Holy Spirit bringing home the truth of God to our minds. Without His continued influence we would totally relapse to ignorance and alienation.

We are not to conclude from our dependence upon the Spirit that we should be passive quietists – no, we are to strive and make use of the means of grace; but all the while we are to know that the Holy Spirit keeps us from the loss of our knowledge of God in Christ. By means of the Spirit's enablement we keep fixing our hopes on the incarnation, sufferings, death and resurrection of the Son of God who is our life. The same gracious Holy Spirit who first revealed Christ in us will do so until the day of eternity – Phil 1:6 (Ibid., pp. 28-29).

Nature may have a superficial knowledge and illumination of the Savior. The natural man may be active and do something for Him. But to love the cross, to suffer with Him, to follow Him through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha as He stoops dumb before His shearers so that your spirit feeds on His flesh and blood and humiliation is a work of God's Spirit in you. The natural man may have His emotions stirred by Christ's passion, but only the true saint is acquainted with Christ in his spirit so as to feed upon his Substitute (Morgan, *The Life and Times of Howell Harris*, p. 239).

The most important question that could ever be asked is: Do you know in reality the living Christ? Do you know Christ by personal revelation? The question is not: Do you read the Bible? Are you religious? The question is: Have you ever seen yourself a lost, vile sinner before a holy God? Have you ever been stripped of your self-righteousness and laid low in the dust of humility? Have you ever viewed by faith the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, all because of a direct and personal revelation to you of God the Holy Spirit? (W. F. Bell, *Do you know Christ by personal revelation?*, Chapel Library).

If you only know Jesus by no more than the world knows, than the learned among men know, you have not the real blessing. If you only know the Lord of Glory by what you have found out yourself, in reading or in talking to others, unaided by the Father's drawing power, you are not blessed with true salvation (Jn 6:44). The true children of God have been made humble. They confess their total dependence upon the grace and mercy of Christ, and place their entire confidence and faith in His meritorious righteousness and shed blood (Ibid.).

Is Christ your Surety, your Substitute, your Sacrifice, and your Savior? Do you believe in Jesus by an inward discernment of Him? Do you clearly see Him as the Son of man and the Son of God? Do you see Him as your propitiation before God? If you know Him in this way, it has not been learned from the instruction of men; you have had a direct revelation made to you by the Father concerning who Jesus Christ really is (Gal 1:16) (Ibid.). The saved have had their eyes enlightened to understand the full and complete satisfaction made by the Son of God; that He has satisfied divine justice for all who believe. They are enabled to apply this to their own hearts. They have the testimony of the blood and the washing of the Holy Spirit (Morgan, p. 78). The true saint never ceases to marvel that God has made an infinite difference between us and our fellow creatures by causing us to behold (by revelation) Christ's death, humiliation, passion (Ibid.)

Five – preach the blood of the cross

What sets apart Christianity from every religion in the world? The answer is substitution. “The life is in the blood,” *I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls* (Lev 17:11). It is by **substitution** that God forgives sin and accepts sinners. It is by substitution that God reveals His character and the character of the sinner. In Israel’s history, God drove home the point of substitution in a national way when He instituted Passover (Horatius Bonar, “The Blood of the Cross”).

On the night before Israel’s exodus from Egypt, the blood of the Passover lamb was applied to the doorpost of each Jewish dwelling. The blood allowed the angel of death to *pass over* the household. The family was protected by the blood of the substitute—the Passover lamb. Are you rejoicing in a complete substitution of *life for life*? To what degree are you rejoicing that God in the flesh took your place on that cruel tree? The elect are redeemed by the very blood of God (Acts 20:28). One of the marks of the elect is that they are filled with overflowing gratitude for divine substitution (Col 2:7).

So many professing believers today do not have certainty regarding the salvation and security of their souls. To NOT know with certainty that the infinite benefits flowing from the blood of Christ are your possession will produce soul misery – there will be no assured peace without that certainty. Uncertainty before accusing law of God and before a sin-hating God will leave your conscience in turmoil and misery. What is uncertainty? It is reflected in the following heart sentiment, “I hope I make it to heaven; I hope that on that last day I will be admitted.” Without absolute certainty, the last day will reveal your *hope* to be an illusion, a dream, and nothing but a mere fancy. You’ll be gripped by sudden fear and terror (Mt 7:21-23). No wonder God’s Word commands us to be *diligent* in making our election and calling CERTAIN (2 Pet 1:9).

God calls and commands you now to AWAKE from sleep (Eph 5:14). Do you profess to believe in Jesus? Make certain you are *reconciled to God*. Be certain that the matters that stand between you and God are thoroughly settled – your certainty regarding reconciliation must be settled upon solid, immovable ground; and not upon shaky, sandy opinions and presumptions.

The saved man sees clearly, by faith, his own interest in Christ’s blood. For the true believer, the “eye” of saving faith rests solely upon Christ and His bloody cross. The false professor rests his trust upon a combination of things; his Bible convictions, his efforts, his moral life, his religious service – something he has done or felt.)

The rejection of the *blood of God* through unbelief involves some of the guilt of shedding it; for to reject its divinely intended purpose is to consent along with the original rejecters to the murder of the Lord of Glory (Mt 27:24; 1 Cor 2:6-9; Acts 2:36-37). To NOT use Christ for the purpose for which the Father gave Him is actually to side with the perpetrators in Christ’s crucifixion.

“You crucified the Lord of Glory” (Acts 2:23; 3:15) was the charge against the unbelieving Jewish nation. Every eye will see Him, *even those who pierced Him* refers to national Israel at the time of Christ’s future return, not simply to the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ day (Zech 12:10; Rev 1:7). The Israelite nation was counted guilty of rejecting Him; even if they did not have a direct part in his betrayal and trial and crucifixion.

A man who was about to push George Whitfield from his open air platform was suddenly addressed by the preacher -- “*Sinner, sinner, thou art the man that crucified the Son of God!*” The startled ruffian was cut to the quick at the prospect that he had lived a life of reveling in sin and had been utterly

indifferent to the shedding of innocent blood; the blood of the Only Begotten Son of God. He went home and repented and was gloriously converted.

Whitfield's words could accurately be directed at each of you who do not believe; but why? Bonar's words are gripping, *from the very first time you heard of His blood being shed, you have acted as one who behaved as if Christ deserved to die. Your unbelief makes you as guilty as those who rejected Him when He was on earth. His blood is charged to your account – if you die in that state you will experience horrors that no fallen angel or demon can experience* (Heb 10:26-31ff).

Your heart is totally at odds with God BECAUSE you are indifferent to the blood of Christ. No one is saved UNLESS he or she enters fully into God's estimate of the precious value of His Son's blood. You must take God's estimate of the blood or the variance and controversy between you and God will continue unabated. Is that blood which is so precious in God's eyes precious in your eyes? (You are not saved unless the answer is a resounding "Yes.")

The controversy between God and the unbeliever about the blood will end only when God brings His vengeance to earth in judgment (2 Thess 1:8-9). *God is as provoked by your indifference toward the blood as He would be by your open hatred of Christ's blood. Do you think that this controversy will be settled in your way or on God's side?* (Horatius Bonar).

Consider what a watershed this message of the blood of Christ is; for the proclamation of Christ's bloody cross is resisted by the prevailing wisdom of our day; by the wisdom of the whole world. The cross of Christ is not regarded by the world as the wisdom and power of God, but as foolishness. *But the world through its "wisdom" did not come to know God* (1 Cor 1:18-25).

The Apostle Paul warns in Philippians 3 that God has marked out a "narrow way" of radical identification with Christ and His cross. The two major soul-destroying departures from the narrow way are as follows: 1.) **legalism** – which describes the activity of those who attempt to win God's favor by religious effort (in this case by circumcision) those of the "false circumcision" (that is outward only and not the heart – Rom 2:25-29; Col 2:11) are referred to by Paul as, "dogs and evil workers" (3:2). 2.) The second departure from the narrow way is **antinomianism** – this is a lifestyle of licentiousness.

The false professor of Christ assumes that he is a saved individual, even though he is living contrary to God's commands. Paul designates this group, "enemies of the cross of Christ" whose real god is their appetite, which refers to their lusts (3:18-19). Where the blood of Christ's cross is applied to the soul, there will be real, tangible, evident deliverance from the lusts of this world (2 Pet 1:4; Titus 2:12-14; Gal 1:4; 6:14-15).

We must continually proclaim what God says about the blood. *God has displayed publicly the fact that His wrath was satisfied in the shedding of Christ's blood* (Rom 3:25). *The blood of Christ was offered to God; it has the power to cleanse the conscience through divine forgiveness* (Heb 9:14-15; 9:19-22). *God 'crushed' His own Son as a guilt offering in order to produce a spiritual offspring* (Is 53:10). *Christ's blood is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins* (Mt 20:28). *The blood and body of Christ has the power to perfect the believer, liberate his conscience from the consciousness of sin, and consecrate the believer to God* (Heb 10:1-2, 10, 14). *The blood of Christ brings the sinner near to God, brings peace, removes the sinner's enmity, and gives him bold and confident access to God* (Eph 2:13-18). *Christ's blood effectively purchased believing sinners for God; His blood produces a whole new lifestyle* (1 Pet 1:18-20). *Christ's blood purchases white raiment to clothe believers so that they can live in God's presence with joy forever* (Rev 7:14). *Because of the blood of Christ, believers will be able to*

stand before God blameless with great joy (Jude 24). The blood of Jesus Christ places the believing sinner in covenant with God because God formed an agreement with His Son before time began that His Son's blood would effectually purchase sinners and make Christ their loving Head (Heb 13:20-21). Christ's blood was given by the grace of God so that believers may enjoy God through the enjoyment of forgiveness (Eph 1:7). The blood of Christ keeps cleansing the believer from sin so that he can walk in fellowship with his holy God (1 Jn 1:7).

Don't take for granted that your estimate of the blood is correct and suitable. If your soul does not feed upon Christ as your 'Passover Lamb' slain, you have no life in yourselves (Jn 6:53-58; 1 Cor 5:7). Only a right sight of the blood can allay the storm of the most guilt-stricken conscience that ever trembled under a broken law.

Says Bonar, consider how sinners treat the blood. By their complacency, they treat the One who shed His own blood as if He were unworthy to live; and even unworthy to die within the walls of the city (Heb 13:11-12; Lev 16:27; Num 19:1-10). Do you admit to the claims that blood has upon you? Namely that you stand on one side of this controversy or the other?

That it affects your entire life, your future (that where you stand in relation to the blood either alienates you from God or reconciles you to God); that your eternal destiny turns upon where you stand in regard to this blood? Do you bow before the truth that God is just to deal with you in this way and on such terms as these? Denial, indifference, derision will sink your soul into everlasting destruction. But fall before the feet of the Savior and the blood will cleanse and purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:14).

To be saved, we must see the blood as God sees it (Ex. 12:13; Is 53:10). It is God's seeing that is your security. It is God's verdict that is your salvation. Nothing can satisfy your conscience but God's verdict. Your conscience will accept nothing less than what God demands in order to satisfy Him. The conscience must know with certainty, "Is God satisfied in my case?" If He is -- then and only then can my conscience be at rest. Then and only then can you have certainty. The propitiation by the blood of Christ was the atoning sacrifice that satisfied God's justice against sin (Rom 3:23-26). Christ paid and paid in His passion; His heart's blood was pumped out onto the dusty ground of Judea -- when He said, "It is finished!" It was because the Father said, "Enough! I am satisfied." Only then could Jesus say, "It is finished."

Only departing from a false estimate of the blood and cleaving to a right estimate of the blood of the cross can reconcile you to God (Col 1:20-22). There can be no peace until then. All of you who are saved have this in common -- an endless overflowing gratitude that the divine life is effectually given in place of your life! The saved will endlessly glory in this unfathomable exchange; in the substitution of the divine life for their life (Eph 1:7; Rom 5:9).

Nothing can speak eternal peace to the conscience but God's VERDICT. God's settled verdict regarding the believer's sin is described in Romans 3:23-26. God's verdict comes from the substitutionary atonement wrought by Christ's death; a substitution that effectually pacified the wrath of God for all who would believe.

Only God's verdict taken into the soul in a particular man's case can bring everlasting peace with God and remove enmity and hostility from the heart (Col 1:19-23). The enmity in the heart will

remain if a man has come short of saving faith in the blood by seeking to quiet his conscience with something other than that which utterly satisfies God. If a man is to have certainty regarding the verdict, he must KNOW that the propitiatory work of Christ was meant for him in particular. A general knowledge of a Savior crucified for sinners will not produce certainty. It must be applied to his own heart as the Passover lamb's blood was applied to the doorposts and lintel.

It is solely the grace of God that brings the sinner to have an eternal interest in the blood of Christ's cross by faith. The Holy Spirit first convinces the sinner of these three things:

1.) **First** that the sinner is **ruined by his sin** – he is helpless to save himself, to work his way out of condemnation; he is unable to do anything to make God save him. He can't even comply with the requirements of salvation (faith and repentance).

2.) **Second**, the Holy Spirit convinces the sinner of Christ's office as **a Perfect Savior who exists to redeem undeserving sinners**; that He is an **all-sufficient Savior, able to save sinners to the uttermost**.

3.) **Third**, the Spirit convinces the person that **Christ is willing to save them just as they are – as guilty defiled sinners** with absolutely nothing to commend them to God. Not only is this third point stressing that Christ is *willing* to receive the sinner merely as a sinner – but that Christ will *only* receive the sinner as a sinner; and not as a person who is accepted in part upon the grounds that he is engaged in self-reformation. When Christ saves a man or woman, He convinces that person that his sin can only be put away *legally* – that is in a manner in keeping with God's Law. The one who trusts Christ and His work on the cross understands that the cross of Christ is the exercise of God's justice. Substitution is based upon God's law. In order for God to forgive guilty sinners, He must do so “legally,” in keeping with His own immutable law (2 Cor 5:21).

Oh how we must deepen our fear of the Lord—God will not wrap up time, consummate the age, and begin the eternal state UNTIL every sin committed is dealt with and judged, sentenced, and condemned. God's wrath is a fearful thing! For God will punish all sin *comprehensively*. There are but two places only where sin is punished comprehensively – in hell and on the cross of Christ. Every man's sins will be punished comprehensively in one of these two places. The punishment for sin on earth is not comprehensive; it is but God's moral government providentially executed in human history. In the present, God is holding back the full expression of His wrath. His long suffering and patience is grossly misinterpreted by impenitent sinners. Every single day without repentance the unbelieving sinner stores up additional divine wrath against himself (Rom 2:1-9).

Because of Christ's blood upon the saved; there is no “punishment” for the believer. God's dealings with the saint are a matter of ‘family discipline.’ He corrects and scourges His sons (Heb 12) – but it is not penal but corrective because Christ has borne the penalty of their sins on the cross.)

In this lesson we have seen the following: that so deeply rooted in the heart is the religion of works and law (the religion we were born with), it takes a mighty work of God's power to reveal His grace to the guilty, unworthy sinner (2 Cor 4:4-6). Man by nature reasons from himself up to God. The sinner cannot take his eyes off of himself – he keeps looking within for something to bring with him to commend him to God or by which he may obligate God and gain pardon. In my experience in prison ministry I discovered that even prisoners appeal to their repentance efforts, their religious efforts, their remorse, and their efforts at restitution as a way to *contribute* to their ‘chances’ of being accepted by God.

Grace must be *revealed* to a man; for it is unnatural to blinded, darkened sinners to reason down from who God is to who they are in themselves. Only grace teaches us that God has taken salvation into

His own hands. Only the Gospel of grace teaches a man that the greatness and magnitude of the gift of salvation is *measured* by the DIGNITY of the divine Giver.

Only the revelation of Christ by the Holy Spirit plants faith in the sinner to look away from himself to the Savior; only then is his dependence lifted above any imagined virtues or worth in himself the ruined creature. The Gospel reasons down from an all-powerful, all-wise God of mercy to the sinner who is stuck in ‘nature’s night,’ and sin’s prison house of depravity. The spiritually dead sinner cannot assist or even cooperate with the salvation process. The glorious news of the Gospel is that it is the POWER of God unto salvation to all who believe.

The Gospel comes bringing the very light and power necessary to take hold of its invaluable promises. The light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, shining into the sinner’s heart *enables* the individual to reason from God down to himself; and to receive God’s gift of eternal life which is Christ Himself (2 Cor 4:4-6).

Conclusion: Evangelical pastors freely acknowledge that to be saved is to be delivered from the terrible consequence of the Fall. But that a man must deeply know and feel it; that he must have his soul weighed down and burdened by it; that the conviction of guilt, wrath, and alarm must be wrought by a supernatural power into his experience; and that he must be ground down by the upper millstone of the law, and the lower millstone of a guilty conscience – these great and solemn truths are shunned, shirked and muffled by nearly all who profess to show the sinner the way to Zion.

But, “Exercise your Christian duties, attend to your family, follow obedience, trust the atonement, honor God in your giving, cultivate holiness” – these and similar exhortations are lavished in boundless profusion upon seeking sinners from thousands of modern pulpits. But the nature, the depths, the power, the feelings, the cutting convictions, the groaning cries, the tearful anguish, the gloomy prospects, the sinking despondency, the utter helplessness, the thick darkness, the wretched unbelief; in a word, all those inward transactions which are carried on in a seeking sinner are passed over by the letter-ministers of the day. These things are taken for granted, and are either totally omitted or slightly alluded to (Philpot, *What is it that saves a soul?*, p. 14).

Scotsman John Kennedy was a great evangelist. Spurgeon mourned his passing when he died in 1884 saying that his loss to the Highlands was greater than the loss of one hundred other men. Kennedy, by his shrewd insight, saw that the whole tendency of the new ‘invitation system’ of evangelism would alter the work of the evangelist. He writes regarding the *new evangelism*:

Faith is represented as something to be done, in order to salvation; and pains are taken to show that it is an easy thing. Better far than this would it be to see it, that those with whom they deal are truly convinced of sin, and labor to set forth Christ before them, in His glorious completeness as Savior. To explain faith to them that they may do it is to set them still to work. . . I know well the tendency there is, at an anxious inquiry, to ask, “What is faith, that I may do it?” It is a legalist’s work to satisfy that craving; but this is what is done in the inquiry room. . . Explanations of what faith is—are but trifling with souls. How different is the Scripture way! The great aim there is to set forth the object, not to explain the act, faith. Let there be conviction, illumination, and renewal, and faith becomes the instinctive response of the quickened soul to the presentation by God of His Christ (Iain Murray, *The Invitation System*, pp. 29-30).