

Christ- Centered Sermons

MODELS *of*
REDEMPTIVE PREACHING

Bryan Chapell

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Preface

Why Christ-Centered Sermons

I love to teach preaching. Nothing brings me more joy than the “aha!” moment when a devoted student or dedicated preacher says, “Now I understand how I can proclaim God’s Word better.” This book is a simple quest for more such “aha!” moments. When *Christ-Centered Preaching* was first published two decades ago, I could not have anticipated, or even dared hope, that the Lord would use it so extensively to help others learn principles of preaching the gospel from all Scripture. I also did not anticipate how often I would be asked to provide examples of those principles.

The book that follows provides two kinds of examples: (1) sermons that exemplify the types of messages taught in *Christ-Centered Preaching*, and (2) structures that demonstrate a variety of preaching techniques and practices that aid expository communication.

Part One of *Christ-Centered Sermons* focuses on structure, with examples of formal, informal, expository, and inductive sermon structures. Instructive notes and references inserted throughout the example sermons describe principles or practices being employed at each stage of the message. My goal, as much as possible, is to create the effect of sitting at the elbow of each reader to say, “Now here I am applying this principle, or using this structure, for this reason.”

Part Two explores various approaches to redemptive interpretation of texts. Each sermon is an example of a different approach to biblical theology, demonstrating how to preach texts that predict, prepare for, reflect, or result from the ministry of

Christ. The instructive notes and references continue to expand readers' exposure to a variety of communication considerations and techniques.

Part Three provides sermons that demonstrate how the redemptive truths excavated from Scripture apply to our lives. Important discussion of how grace motivates and enables Christian dedication unfolds with varying emphases in the different examples. In addition, messages in this portion of the book explore the supernatural aspects of our union with Christ and the power of the Word in order to provide preachers the hope and boldness they need to preach in challenging circumstances.

The introduction following this preface is a summary of the principles of *Christ-Centered Preaching* that lays the foundation for the examples that follow. My prayer is that these principles will combine with the concrete examples in the remainder of the book to provide readers clear guidance and confidence for a lifetime of preaching Christ-centered sermons.

Introduction

Christ-Centered Sermons

Expository preaching has a simple goal: to say what God says. Expository preachers presume that true spiritual health can only be produced by the Spirit of God. That Spirit inspired the Word of God as his only infallible witness to the minds and hearts of his people (2 Tim. 3:16–17). As the Spirit works by and with the Word in our hearts, God teaches us the truths needed for us to understand, experience, and honor him.¹ Thus, the chief goal of preachers who desire to proclaim God’s truths should be to say what the Holy Spirit has said in the Bible. The most dependable way to do this is to explain the meaning of biblical texts and show how they apply to the lives of believers. Such explanation drives the preacher to serious study of God’s Word for careful articulation of both its original meaning and its present significance. Making sure God’s people know what God has said and why he has said it is the tandem goal of expository preaching.²

Preaching with God’s Goals

We need to understand that the preacher’s concern should not only be instructive. God is active in his Word, convicting the heart, renewing the mind, and

1. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.5, 7; hereinafter *WCF*.

2. This chapter is used with permission and adapted from the author’s “The Necessity of Preaching Grace for Progress in Sanctification,” in *All for Jesus: A Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary*, ed. Robert Peterson and Sean Lucas (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2006).

strengthening the will. This means that preaching is not simply an instructive lecture; it is a redemptive event. If we think of the sermon only as a means of transferring information, then we will prioritize making the message dense with historical facts, moral instruction, and memory-retention devices that seem designed to prepare listeners for later tests of formal doctrine or factual knowledge. Such tests are rare. And most people's inability to remember a sermon's content in following days can devastate the ego of a preacher whose primary goal is the congregation's doctrinal or biblical literacy.

The needed reordering of priorities will not come by emptying the sermon of biblical content but by preparing it with the goals of equipping God's people for spiritual warfare and welfare. Our primary goal is not preparing people for later tests of mind or behavior but rather humbling the heart and strengthening the will of each listener in the present moment. Because God is active in his Word, we should preach with the conviction that the Spirit of God will use the truths of his Word *as we preach* to change hearts now! As hearts change, lives change—even when sermon specifics are forgotten (Prov. 4:23).

Preparing for hearts to receive the transforming truths of any biblical passage requires careful study of God's Word and caring insight into God's people (2 Tim. 2:15). Simply reciting commentary information is not preaching. The faithful preacher must marshal facts, doctrine, illustrations, and applications together with the dynamics of pastoral *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* to address both what listeners need to hear and what they are capable of hearing (1 Thess. 2:2–13).³ Organizational tools that help communicate biblical truths with these means predominate the early chapters of my book *Christ-Centered Preaching*, and the sermon examples in Part One of this companion volume highlight such. These examples feature both formal and informal structures, along with comments about techniques that will help listeners understand and remember messages.

These organizational aids are not the core of any sermon but help communicate the content that is. If our sermons are not interesting, clear, or organized, then we put our credibility into question and may undermine the truths we speak. So it is important to learn the tools of language and structure that make our messages

3. See thoughts regarding the “necessities and capacities of the hearers” in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 159. Relevant discussion of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appears in chap. 1 of the author's *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); hereinafter *CCP*. Chaps. 4 and 6 of *CCP* deal primarily with issues of organization and structure.

fire the imagination, illumine understanding, and glow in memory. But again, these effects—as desirable and helpful as they may be—are not our chief concern. The ultimate goal of the sermon is not to create fascination, inform the mind, or impact memory but rather to confront the mind and heart with biblical truth in order to conform the will of the hearer to the purposes of Christ. Our preaching should not be judged primarily by what people sense, learn, or remember from the sermon but by how they live in the wake of our message.

The preacher's obligation to *transform* as well as *inform* should compel us to ensure that our sermons are instruments of empowering grace and conduits for needed truth. My concern for excavating principles of grace from all Scripture has an intensely personal origin. The inadequacies of my preaching were torturing me, and I wondered whether I should leave the ministry. I could not figure out what was wrong. Church members complimented my preaching, but their lives were consistently plagued by depression, addictions, and anger with each other. I had to question, "If I am such a good preacher, then why are the people I serve doing so badly?" Ultimately, I determined that a central reason for their despair, their escapist compulsions, and their judgmental impatience with one another was a pattern of thought that I was unintentionally encouraging.

Preaching God's Whole Counsel

The pattern of thought that I reinforced was not immediately apparent to me because I believed that my preaching was faithful to the commands of God's inerrant Word. The same Bible that attests to my Savior's virgin birth, sinless life, substitutionary atonement, physical resurrection, Great Commission, and sovereign rule also calls God's people to holiness. I knew that I could not embrace all that is dear to me in God's Word without also embracing its commands. So I preached the whole counsel of God as I understood it.

Week after week, I told the imperfect people in my church to "do better." But this drumbeat for improvement, devoid of the encouragements and empowerments of grace, actually undermined the holiness that I was seeking to exhort. When God's people hear only the imperatives of the Word, they are forced to conclude that their righteousness is a product of their efforts. There are only two possible reactions to such preaching: despair or pride. Some will reason, "I will

never meet God's requirements," leading them to hopelessness; others will assert, "I have measured up to what God requires—at least, compared to other people," leading to spiritual arrogance and intolerance.

Preaching the Redemptive Context

I recognized that these reactions were symptoms of spiritual sickness, but I did not know the cure. I had to learn that the remedy was preaching not less of Scripture but more. In particular, I needed to learn to preach each text in its redemptive context. Paul writes in Romans, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Scanning the scope of the law and the prophets, the apostle is able to say that all Scripture was intended to give us hope. All Scripture has a redemptive purpose. None of the Scriptures are so limited in purpose as to give us only moral instruction or lifestyle correction. Paul says that even the law itself functions as our "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24 KJV). Jesus also says that the law and all the prophets testify about him (see Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

We will call into question the accuracy of these sweeping claims of Paul and Jesus if we think of messianic revelation only in terms of direct statements about the person of Christ. Vast portions of both the Old and New Testaments make no explicit mention of Christ. Even the prophetic books that predict the coming Messiah contain much material that does not have Jesus as the direct subject. Christ surely knew this; Luke records the Savior's postresurrection teaching about himself: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27 NIV). How can Jesus offer such exposition, and by corollary require such exposition from us, if the text does not make direct reference to him?⁴

The apostle Paul helps us answer that question in his discussions of how the law of God reveals dimensions of the Bible's redemptive hope. Though Paul never denies the importance, rightness, or necessity of obedience, he explains that through the law he died to the law. That is to say, the righteous requirements of the holiness of God that were always beyond his grasp signaled the death of hope in human

4. See *CCP*, 275–76.

achievement for spiritual life. The moral instruction of a holy God revealed that no one was capable of holiness by his or her own efforts. Our best works are judged but filthy rags in the Old Testament (Isa. 64:6), and the Savior echoes, “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’” (Luke 17:10 NIV).

The same law that reveals the requirements of God’s holiness also reveals the inescapable reality of our unholiness. Because of “the great disproportion” between our best works and God’s righteousness, we are always and forever incapable of the righteousness that would reconcile us to a holy God.⁵ This hardly seems a redemptive message. And it would not be were it not for the alternative it demands.

By exposing the holy nature of the God who provides redemption and by exposing the finite nature of humanity that requires redemption, the law points to the necessity of a Redeemer and prepares the human heart to seek him. The law, however, is only one aspect of Scripture that helps reveal the person and work of Christ without making explicit mention of him.

Christ-centered exposition of Scripture does not require us to unveil depictions of Jesus by mysterious alchemies of allegory or typology; rather, it identifies how every text functions in furthering our understanding of who Christ is, what the Father sent him to do, and why. The goal is not to make a specific reference to Jesus magically appear from every camel track of Hebrew narrative or every metaphor of Hebrew poetry (leading to allegorical errors) but rather to show how every text contributes to the unfolding revolution of the grace of God that culminates in the person and work of Christ.

Such an interpretive approach will always take the preacher to the heart of the Redeemer by requiring discernment of the progressive and ever-present revelation of God’s sovereign grace throughout Scripture. Discerning the gracious character of God in his revelation also rescues our theology from abstraction. By consistently preaching about the God who traverses the universe he created in order to redeem his creatures by his blood, we become relationally bound to the reality of a living and loving Lord.⁶ Our listeners become so bound as well—truly linked to God in heart rather than being proud of thoughts or practices that they feel distinguish them from others who are less informed or less good.

5. WCF, XVI.5.

6. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 54.

Discerning the Redemptive Context

A primary approach to discerning the redemptive nature of a biblical text is identifying how the passage *predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results* from the person and work of Christ.⁷ Part Two of this book provides examples of sermons that take one or more of these approaches to a biblical text. Each of these approaches is a version of biblical theology, employing redemptive-historical methods of interpretation.

Redemptive-historical methods seek to identify how a passage from any portion of Scripture furthers our understanding of what Christ has done or will do in redemptive history. Prophecies obviously *predict* Christ and explain much of what he will do. The temple sacrifices predict what Christ will do but also typologically *prepare* the people of God to understand the nature of the atoning work of the Savior. The relationship of Hosea and Gomer not only prepares the covenant people to understand how God will love Israel despite her sin but also *reflects* the need for and nature of God's pardoning mercy in all ages. Our ability to seek that pardoning mercy at the throne of grace is a *result* of our great High Priest going before us to prepare the way and to make petitions in our behalf.

Dead Ends and Bridges

The preceding four categories of redemptive-historical explanation are not—and should not be—rigidly segregated. Our goal is not to make every passage fit neatly into a human category of interpretation. Instead, preachers bear the greatest expository fruit when they understand that what they are seeking to expose are gospel truths that signal and apply God's work of redemption in Christ.

Entire epochs and genres of Scripture are designed by the Holy Spirit to reveal dimensions of grace that will ultimately be accomplished and applied in Christ.⁸ These broad aspects of Scripture may contain multiple expressions of redemptive revelation, including information about paths that do not lead to spiritual safety. For example, the period of the judges not only reveals the power of divine aid; it also demonstrates the folly of seeking to do what each person finds acceptable in his own eyes to maintain a covenant people. The kingship

7. See *CCP*, 282–88.

8. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 166.

of Israel similarly demonstrates the folly of depending on human leaders to establish a righteous rule for the covenant people. The Old Testament takes us down many such redemptive *dead ends* for the purpose of turning us from human to divine dependence.⁹

By way of contrast, some aspects of Scripture function as redemptive *bridges* that allow the covenant people to progress in their understanding of redeeming grace. For example, the Lord's calling and preservation of the diminutive nation of Israel serves as a perpetual statement that God's mercy is extended not just to the strong, capable, and deserving (Deut. 7:7). The provision of the manna in the wilderness, as well as the provision of the prophets of the Word, helps all subsequent generations remain confident in God's provision of living bread—his Word (John 6:35; 1 Cor. 10:3, 16). No single account reveals all that needs to be known, but each account bridges chasms in human understanding until the highway of salvation leading to Christ is complete.

Again, these categories of dead ends and bridges should not be rigidly maintained. The temple sacrifices are, on one level, a dead end in that they demonstrate that the blood of bulls and goats could never fully atone for sin (Heb. 10:1–4). Yet, at another level, the sacrificial system is also a bridge to understanding what God did later for the nations through the Lamb of God (Heb. 10:5–9). The primary reasons to be aware of these differing categories are so that (1) we will *not* try to make every portion of Scripture a positive expression of grace; sometimes God saves by saying, “Don't go down this path!,” and (2) we will *not* try to make a passage a final statement of God's salvation plan, if it is only a bridge.

Sermon examples in Part Two of this book will also show how biblical passages can function as redemptive dead ends and/or bridges in order to lead us to a fuller understanding of Christ's necessity and purpose. Highlighting these purposes is not meant to exclude other insights. Passages can be classified in numerous ways that help relate the many varieties of Scripture passages to the person and work of Christ.¹⁰ The goal is not to determine a master metaphor that will provide a proper niche for all passages. Such pigeonholing of texts typically limits the implications of the Bible's own rich variety of metaphors that are used to relate redemptive truth (e.g., kingdom, family, Sabbath, tree). What we should not lose sight of among

9. See *CCP*, 305–6.

10. Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1988), 9–16.

the many legitimate possibilities for redemptive interpretation is the necessity of exposing the grace of God that all Scripture is designed to help us see.¹¹

Macro- and Micro-Interpretations

We should always observe biblical texts through spectacles containing the lenses of these two questions: How is the Holy Spirit revealing in this text the nature of God that provides redemption? And how is the Holy Spirit revealing in this text the nature of humanity that requires redemption? As long as we use these lenses, we will interpret as Christ did when he showed his disciples how all Scripture spoke of him.

Asking these two questions (or using these two lenses) maintains faithful exposition and demonstrates that redemptive interpretation does not require the preacher to run from Genesis to Revelation in every sermon to expound a text's redemptive truths. While there is nothing wrong with such macro-interpretations, it is also possible—and often more fruitful—to identify the doctrinal statements or relational interactions in the immediate text that reveal some dimension of God's grace. The relational interactions in such micro-interpretations can include how God acts toward his people (e.g., providing strength for weakness, pardon for sin, provision in want, faithfulness in response to unfaithfulness) or how an individual representing God provides for others (e.g., David's care for Mephibosheth, Solomon's wisdom recorded for others less wise).¹² Examples of both macro- and micro-redemptive interpretation will be provided in Part Two of this book.

Fallen Condition (Divine Solution) Focus

In essence, redemptive exposition requires that we identify an aspect of our fallen condition that is addressed by the Holy Spirit in each passage, which he inspired for

11. Jonathan Edwards proposes such an approach in his "Letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey," saying, "The whole of it [Christian theology], in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ" as the "*summum* and *ultimum* of all the divine operations and decrees." See Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: American Book, 1935), 411–12.

12. See *CCP*, 306–8.

our edification, and then show God's way out of the human dilemma.¹³ Identification of an appropriate fallen condition focus (FCF) will occur in each sermon of this book. Attention to such a pattern in Scripture not only exposes the human predicament that requires God's relief but also forces the preacher to focus on a divine solution. Our salvation rests in God's provision. God's glory is always the highest purpose of the sermon. The vaunting of human ability and puffing of human pride vanish in such preaching, not because imperatives of the law of God are minimized, but because God is always the hero of the text.¹⁴ He enables our righteousness, pardons our unrighteousness, and provides our strength rescuing us from our human dilemma.

Preaching the Grace of Holiness

This consistent preaching of the dimensions of God's grace does not render superfluous the commands of the law but honors their authority by providing the biblical motivation and enablement necessary for our obedience. However, the fear that the regular preaching of grace will lead to antinomianism is sometimes justified. The human heart is more than capable of abusing grace as a means of excusing sin. Those who come from a legalistic background often overcompensate for their gospel-weak past by launching into law-deaf pastimes. Still, despite this danger, there is no legitimate alternative to preaching the grace that underlies all biblical testimony. Such preaching defines grace not as the world does (a license to do as I please) but as the Bible teaches (a mercy so overwhelming that it compels me to do what pleases God).¹⁵

Grace-based preaching does not eliminate the moral obligations of the law. In the example sermons of this book, both the explanation and the application of texts will include appropriate use of the imperatives of Scripture. We need to remember that the Bible's standards for our attitudes and behaviors reflect the character of God and are provided for our good and his glory. The preaching of grace should not negate the law but provide an antidote for pride in its performance and an incentive for conscientiousness in its observance.¹⁶

13. See *CCP*, 48–52 and 299–305.

14. See *CCP*, 289–95.

15. J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1992), 75.

16. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 1; *Westminster Larger Catechism*, questions 32, 97, 168, 174, 178; *Heidelberg Catechism*, questions 1, 2, 32, 86; *WCF*, XVI.2; XIX.6, 7; XX.1; XXII.6.

Motivating Holiness by Grace

The motivating power of grace becomes evident in Christ's words, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Because the redemptive interpretation of Scripture leads to sermons marked by consistent adulation of the mercy of God in Christ, people who hear such preaching are continually stoked with more fuel to love God.¹⁷ Such inflamed love becomes the primary motivation for Christian obedience, ethics, and compassion as hearts respond with fervor for the purposes of the Savior they love.¹⁸

For the believer, there is no greater spiritual motivation than grace-stimulated love—not fear or guilt or gain (though each of these can have secondary roles in God's motivation hierarchy if they are not separated from love).¹⁹ As our love results in discipleship that demonstrates the beauty and blessing of walking with God, greater love for God grows and stimulates even more desire for loving him, his purposes, his creation, and his people.

The Bible recognizes no definition of grace that excuses sin, encourages moral license, or creates disregard for the needs of others. The burning love for God ignited by the consistent preaching of grace makes those in whom the Spirit dwells want to walk with God and follow the commands that please him. This is why the apostle Paul could say that the grace of God "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions" (Titus 2:12 NIV). When grace is properly perceived, the law is not trashed; it is treasured.

In grace-based preaching, the rules do not change; the reasons do.²⁰ We serve God *because* we love him, not *in order* to make him love us. After all, how could production or presentation of filthy rags—which is the status of our best works before a holy God (Isa. 64:6)—make him love us? The grace of Christ releases us from the performance treadmill that (falsely) promises to provide holiness through human effort. The effect on the heart is love that compels us to please him (2 Cor. 5:14). For this reason all of the sermon examples in this book will

17. See the author's *Holiness by Grace: Delighting in the Joy That Is Our Strength* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 154; and *CCP*, 321.

18. Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection," in *History and Repository of Pulpit Eloquence*, ed. Henry C. Fish, vol. 2 (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1856), 326. See also Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1999).

19. Chapell, *Holiness by Grace*, 29–31; *CCP*, 320–23.

20. *CCP*, 312.

attempt to expose grace in a way that stimulates greater love for God and, as a consequence, greater obedience to him.

Consistent focus on the grace of God does not automatically create disdain or disregard for God's standards. Rather, his overwhelming and unconditional mercy that ensures "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1 NIV) is the kindness that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). When we are deeply touched with the greatness of this kindness through consistent preaching of the grace that is throughout Scripture, then we love God more. As a consequence, we *want* to turn from the sin that grieves the One we love (Eph. 4:30). Our affections, though still flawed and still capable of wandering, are transformed (Rom. 8:5–15). The heart that once found pleasure in sin now only finds peace, satisfaction, and joy in the presence and purposes of the Savior.

Motivating Holiness by the Cross

The primary message that stimulates such compelling love is the cross of Christ. Contemporary theologians may wince at such statements about Christ's atoning sacrifice because they may seem to slight the resurrection, second coming, and other key redemptive events. It is certainly true that without the resurrection the cross would have signaled nothing but a gory death on a distant hill. The victory over sin accomplished by the resurrection and the vindication of righteousness promised in the consummation are vital truths for perseverance in Christian faithfulness. Still, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he resolved to preach nothing among them but Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), he reflected a profound understanding of humanity. The Father's matchless gift of the life of his Son and Jesus's selfless offering of himself stir the human heart at its deepest levels to make it tender toward God, receptive of his Word, and responsive to the Spirit.

The old preaching imperative "make much of the blood" reflects great wisdom about human motivation. The cross stimulates love for God, the resurrection zeal for his purposes, and the second coming perseverance in his cause. All are necessary, but God's mercy toward the undeserving—as it unfolds through Scripture and culminates in the cross—is still the message that programs the heart to receive and employ all the other truths of the gospel.

The primary reason we must preach the grace of God from all the Scriptures is not so that we will master an interpretive skill or even produce correct exegesis. Biblical

theology practiced merely as a science of interpretation encourages theological debate and spiritual pride as we strive to find and exhibit the golden thread that will unite all Scripture under a dominant theme (e.g., kingdom, covenant, creation-fall-redemption-consummation, family). Such themes undeniably aid our perceptions of the structure of Scripture, but the true goal of redemptive preaching is to expound the ways in which God progressively and consistently shows dimensions of his mercy in all ages so that we will understand Christ's sacrifice more fully and, consequently, love him more.²¹ Any practice of biblical theology that does not have this relational aim is misdirected.²² Thus, all of the example sermons in the pages that follow seek to reveal dimensions of God's provision that will stimulate greater love for him.

If stimulation of love for God seems inappropriate as a primary goal for preaching, then we have not fully considered the primary goal of our lives. Our "chief end," said the great leaders of the Reformation, is "to glorify God, and to enjoy him."²³ Without a profound love for him, we can do neither. Love for him leads us to seek him, serve him, repent to him, and return to him. All the requirements of love for God find their impulse at the cross. From there radiate many implications and imperatives, but still the cross is the center for the heart seeking God.

Enabling Holiness by Union with Christ

Christ's victory on the cross provides freedom from both the guilt and power of sin. The apostle Paul reminds us that, because Jesus resides in us, we possess the resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:18–23). John adds, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). This is more than a promise that Jesus will add to our strength or aid our resolve. Because we are in union with Christ, all of the merits of his righteousness have become ours, and his Spirit now enables us to resist the sin that he reveals to us.²⁴ In the terms of classic theology, once we were not able not to sin (*non posse non*

21. Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," a pamphlet form of Vos's inaugural address upon assuming the new chair of biblical theology at Princeton Seminary (a copy in the Covenant Theological Seminary Library, n.d., ca. 1895), 16. This address in elaborated form became the introduction of Vos's *Biblical Theology* (1948; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

22. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 92–96.

23. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 1.

24. Chapell, *Holiness by Grace*, 52–63, 140–43.

peccare), but now we are able not to sin (*posse non peccare*).²⁵ Enough of the influence of our sin nature persists that we will not perfectly perform his will until we are with Jesus in eternal glory when we will be not able to sin (*non posse peccare*), but even now we are freed from Satan's lie that we cannot change. Sin has no more dominion over us (Rom. 6:14–18). We can make progress against the besetting sins of our lives because we are alive in Christ—whose resurrection power indwells us.

The release of sin's guilt *and* the reception of Christ's benefits are required content for messages that preach a complete gospel of grace. Sometimes preachers preach only a partial gospel, indicating that the debt of our sin has been paid by the suffering of Christ (i.e., his passive righteousness). This is a glorious and precious truth for all Christians who know their need of forgiveness. Yet even if our debt has been paid, it is still possible to live with a sense of inadequacy and humiliation because of our sin. It is as though we recognize that our debt has been paid, but though we are grateful, our spiritual math still indicates that we have only a zero-sum balance: Christ's death on our behalf makes us feel guilty and small, rather than free of debt.

To counter such feelings, we need to understand the full benefits of the gospel, which are ours by virtue of our union with Christ. Yes, we have been freed of our debt, but we also have been supplied with Christ's righteousness (resulting from his active and passive righteousness). Before God, we are already accounted as heirs of heaven, coheirs with Christ, and children of God (Rom. 8:16–17). This adoption signals our worth and preciousness to God prior to our entry into heaven. So sure is our status and so rich is our righteousness that our heavenly Father already considers us holy and pleasing to him (Rom. 12:1) and has already seated us in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Because we are in union with Christ, his status is ours (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20). Though we are striving with the power of Christ's Spirit to overcome sinful thoughts and acts in our lives, God has already reckoned us holy by his grace embraced through our faith. This positional sanctification gives us the foundation for our progressive sanctification (Heb. 10:14).²⁶ The security we have in heaven provides the foundation we need to resist the assaults of Satan on earth. These concepts are so key, and so often missing in evangelical preaching, that they are a special focus of the messages in Part Three of this book.

25. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 216–21.

26. See the author's *In the Grip of Grace: When You Can't Hang On: The Promises of Romans 8* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 54–58; and Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 108.

Preaching the Indicatives of the Gospel

Part Three will also focus on the relationship between the indicatives of our relationship with Christ (*who we are* as redeemed persons) and the imperatives for the Christian life (*what we are to do* as those called from darkness into his marvelous light). The indicatives of the gospel assure us of God's love and strengthen us for his purposes despite our present weaknesses. The imperatives identify God's purposes and the standards we must follow in order to fulfill them.

The power of the indicatives of the gospel results when believers understand that we are not waiting to enter heaven to claim the benefits of God's grace. The future reality of sinless perfection awaits us in glory, but we already possess its status through the certainty of the promises of God and the guarantee of the Spirit in us (2 Cor. 5:5). We are already dearly loved children (Eph. 5:1), robed in Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), by faith counted holy before God (1 Pet. 2:9), and indwelt by his Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

The mark of that Spirit in us is not the absence of sin in our lives but the presence of new desires and new power to overcome temptation (Rom. 8:5–15). When we weep over our sin, we may question if the power of the Spirit is real in us. But in a wonderful confirmation of our status as new creatures in Christ, the grief we feel for sin is the assurance of our ability.²⁷ Before the Spirit filled us, our hearts were—and could only be—hostile to God. But now when we sin, we hate it. The hatred of sin and godly sorrow for its expression are the evidence of the Spirit in us and of heaven before us. Were not the Spirit in us, there could be no sorrow for sin (other than the sorrow of consequences). But when we truly grieve that our sin has grieved the Spirit, trampled on the blood of our Savior, and offended our heavenly Father, then we evidence a heart renewed by the Spirit and made able by him to resist sin.

Preaching the Imperatives of the Gospel

Hatred of sin, freedom from past guilt, possession of Christ's righteousness and power, and assurance of future grace combine to equip Christians for the holy race God calls us to run (Heb. 12:1). However, it is important to remember that

27. Chapell, *In the Grip of Grace*, 32–37.

all of these truths rest on the person and work of Jesus Christ. There will be no progress in the Christian life without the past, present, and future grace of our Lord. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). No sentence in Scripture better underscores the need for Christ-centered preaching. The grace of God that is ultimately revealed in Christ frees us from our guilt and enables us to obey. Preaching that seeks to issue imperatives (what to do) from a biblical text without identifying the indicatives of the gospel (who we are by grace alone) to which the text points robs listeners of their only source of power to do what God requires.²⁸

No one can serve God apart from Christ. A message full of imperatives (e.g., “be like [a commendable Bible character]”; “be good [by adopting these moral behaviors]”; “be disciplined [by diligence in these practices]”) but devoid of grace is antithetical to the gospel. These “be messages” are not wrong *in* themselves; but *by* themselves they are spiritually deadly because they imply that we make or break our relationship with God by our works.²⁹

When we preach a biblical imperative in isolation from grace, we take what should be a blessing and make it deadly for the soul. The imperatives of the law are good and nourishing for the Christian life only to the extent that grace motivates and empowers their fulfillment.³⁰ Without a foundation of grace, sermons on holiness will only sink hearers’ souls into the quagmires that surround human inadequacy.

We must remember that even our best works deserve God’s reproof unless they are sanctified by Christ.³¹ God delights in our good works only when they are presented to him in Christ.³² This means that even if we do not mention Jesus by name in the explanation of a text, we must show how the text reveals aspects of his grace in order to provide hope that the obligations of the text can be fulfilled.³³ Just as the necessity of a Christ-focus in all preaching is indicated by Jesus’s words, “Apart from me you can do nothing,” so also the power of such a focus is indicated in Paul’s words, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

28. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 253.

29. *CCP*, 289–95.

30. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.7.i–iii and ix.

31. *WCF*, XVI.5.

32. *WCF*, XVI.6.

33. *CCP*, 303.

The necessity and sufficiency of grace for power to obey God are dominant themes in the example sermons of Part Three of this book.

Keys to Enabling Power

Christian preaching must consistently proclaim the grace of God because in helping God's people to love him we also enable them to serve him. The final emphasis of Part Three is exploration of the relationship between the motivations and the enabling power of application. In *Christ-Centered Preaching* I indicate that sermons should help listeners to answer four questions about a biblical text's application to their lives:

1. What am I to do?
2. Where am I to do it?
3. Why am I to do it?
4. How am I to do it?

Preachers often focus only on questions 1 and 2. Christ-centered preaching gives equal importance to questions 3 and 4. Question 3 is important because doing the right things for the wrong reasons is wrong. If I practice spiritual disciplines to bribe God for his favor, the disciplines are good but my motive makes my practice of them abhorrent to God. Question 4 is important because telling people what to do without telling them how is cruel. If my sermon admonishes people to correct bad behavior but gives no means or tools for such correction, then I have left people in a hopeless quandary.

Already I have discussed how love for God motivates Christian obedience. Expressing our love for God in response to his grace is the greatest motivation for the Christian.³⁴ But it is possible to love another and still not be able to express it adequately. Virtually all Christians want to serve God better. We want to withdraw from our addictions, overcome our fears, become more compassionate, offer forgiveness more readily, defeat our weaknesses, and find fresh courage. Our problem is not that we do not want to change but that we do not know how. Key

34. As discussed in *CCP* (322–23) and *Holiness by Grace* (195–97), there are other motivations for obedience, but love for God must remain the motivation of highest priority in order for Christian obedience truly to honor God above all else.

to our enabling with the power of the gospel is understanding that the *why* is the *how*; motivation and enablement unite in the victory of holiness.³⁵

Great love for God is also great power for obedience. This is not only because love is necessary for true faith but also because love is power. In order to understand the power of love, we must ask ourselves a critical question: What is the primary reason that sin has power in our lives? Sin's power has already been defeated; we are no longer its slaves. So why do we yield to sin? The ultimate answer is that we love it. If sin had no attraction for us, then it would have no power over us.

We sin because, in the moment and for earthly benefits, we love the sin more than we love the Savior. People who sin but claim that they still love God may not think that they are lying, but in the moment that they sin, they love the sin more than they love God. Such people are no different than an adulterer who says to his wife, "The other woman meant nothing to me; I still love you." The man may still love his wife, but in the moment of the sin, he loved the other person—or at least the passion—more than he loved his wife.

The reality of love for sin, which provides sin's power, leads to a second critical question: What will drive love for sin from our hearts? The answer: a surpassing love. When love for Christ supersedes love for sin, then the attraction of sin is displaced by a desire to honor him.

This answer does not deny that Scripture clearly motivates us with *warnings* that the pleasures of sin are temporary, its consequences are ruinous, and the discipline of God is painful. Additionally, we are told that *rewards* of blessings and peace accompany obedience—although the full blessings may not be experienced in this life, and the peace may be beyond understanding (Rom. 8:18; Phil. 4:7). The warnings and rewards in Scripture are intended to direct us from sin, and we must preach the practical implications of such to be faithful expounders of the whole counsel of God.

We should recognize, however, that warnings and rewards are made effective by self-love; that is, we heed warnings to avoid personal loss, and we pursue rewards for personal gain. God stoops to his children to guide us by such self-affection, but these motivations—as important and right as they are for the saints—cannot be the most important for those whose "first" and "greatest" commandment is to

35. See *CCP*, 323–27.

“love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30 NIV).

There is a reason that love for God is the primary and foundational commandment. Though warnings and rewards dampen our desire for sin, they are not sin’s most powerful deterrent. What will cut off love for sin at its source? The answer, again, is a surpassing love. Our love for sin—which provides its present power—is overcome when love for sin is displaced by a greater love. Thomas Chalmers’s famous sermon “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” yet rings true.³⁶ When love for Christ exceeds all other loves, then the desire to walk with him exceeds all other desires. Thus, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). These words of the Savior make it clear that when love for God is our primary motivation, then honoring him is our chief and most compelling desire.

Now we have a final critical question to answer in order to determine the full content of the applications we preach: If love for God is the Christian’s primary motivation and power for honoring him, then what will fill our hearts with love for him? The answer: “Amazing grace . . . that saved a wretch like me.” He loved me before I knew him. He died for me while I was yet his enemy. He keeps me when I fall. He holds me when I fail. He abides faithful though I am faithless. He forgives me when I am wrong and loves me, loves me still. Such grace fills our hearts with surpassing love for God, which is the power for Christian living because such love displaces love for sin and supersedes love for self with love for the Savior.

The power of grace to stimulate love for God is the ultimate reason we preach redemptive interpretations of Scripture. Sermons marked by consistent adulation of the mercy of God in Christ continually fill the Christian heart with more cause to love God. This love becomes the *primary* motivation and power for Christian obedience, as hearts in which the Spirit dwells respond with love for their Savior. This is why the apostle Paul wrote: “The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, . . . that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

Our preaching should be designed to fuel a preeminent love for God that makes doing his will the believer’s greatest joy (2 Cor. 5:9), knowing this joy is

36. Chalmers, *History and Repository of Pulpit Eloquence*.

the strength for fulfilling our responsibilities (Neh. 8:10). Preaching grace fans into flame zeal for the Savior. Thus, emphasizing the grace of all the Scriptures is not simply an interpretive scheme required by the Bible's overarching themes; it is regular exposure of the heart of God to ignite love for him in the heart of believers. We expound the gospel truths that pervade Scripture in order to fill the hearts of believers with delight in service to him, which is the strength of their living for him. Grace leads to godliness because it stimulates love that makes service to the Savior our greatest joy.³⁷

Preaching the Power of Joy

The final sermon examples in this book explore the themes of empowering joy. Preaching remains a joy when pastors discern that their task is not to harangue or guilt parishioners into servile duty but rather to fill them up with love for God by extolling the wonders of his grace. Too many preachers leave ministry or become ineffective in it because they perceive their lot in life to be whipping recalcitrant parishioners into more diligent service. Of course, preaching must condemn sin and challenge the slothful, but without the context of love such ministry becomes a burden to all—including the minister. There is a better way to preach.

The better way always connects Scripture's commands with the motivation and enablement of grace. Imperatives do not disappear from such preaching because the commands of God are an expression of his nature and of his care for us. Still, the imperatives are always founded on the redemptive indicatives that give people confidence in God's faithfulness even in the face of their failures. We discourage people from basing their justification on their sanctification (i.e., determining if they are right with God based on the quality or quantity of their religious performance), and instead encourage them to live in the assurance of the completed work of Christ in their behalf.³⁸

When our people perceive the present value of the blood of Christ, which unites them to him, then they serve God with growing confidence in his blessing and power rather than with increasing dread of, or callousness to, his frown. Those who know that their forgiven status and family position are not jeopardized by the

37. Chapell, *Holiness by Grace*, 107–9; and *CCP*, 326.

38. Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 101.

weaknesses of their present humanity live in loving service to Christ rather than in self-justifying competition and judgment of others.³⁹

Consistent preaching of the gospel's assurances drives despair and pride from the Christian life. As a consequence, congregations find that spiritual fatigue, competitiveness, and insensitivity wane; in their place flow new joy in Christ, desire to make him Lord over the whole of life, understanding of the weak, care for the hurting, forgiveness for those who offend, and even love for the lost. In short, the Christian community becomes an instrument of grace because God's love becomes the substance of the church's soul. In such contexts, ministers thrive and their ministries become a blessing to all (including themselves and their families) rather than a burden. Without question, there will also be challenges and disappointments, but even these will not destroy the joy that God builds on a foundation of grace.

The necessity of grace for preaching that is true to the gospel leads to a basic question that all must answer in order to affirm that they are preaching the Christianity of the Bible: "Do I preach grace?" Would your sermons be perfectly acceptable in a synagogue or mosque because you are only encouraging better moral behavior that any major religion would find acceptable?⁴⁰ If this is so, the path to a better, more Christian message is not through preaching any less of Scripture but through preaching more. Do not stop preaching until Christ has found his place in your sermon and his grace has found its way into the heart of your message. In this way, the people to whom you preach Christ-centered sermons will walk with him, and his joy will be their strength to do his will.

39. Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality in The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, vol. 3 (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 200; and *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 134.

40. Jay Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: A Comprehensive Textbook on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 152.

Part One

Structure



Organizational tools that help communicate biblical truths predominate the early chapters of my book *Christ-Centered Preaching*, and the sermon examples in Part One of this companion volume highlight these tools. These examples feature both formal and informal structures, along with comments about techniques that will help listeners understand and remember messages.

Expository Sermon in Formal Structure Format

This first example sermon introduces the formal wording and structure of sermons constructed according to classical standards as described in chapter 6 of *Christ-Centered Preaching*.¹ The example contains many notations, format identifiers, and footnotes that function as instructional commentary. This “extra” commentary makes the sermon appear unusually long, but the actual preaching content is that of a traditional thirty- to thirty-five-minute sermon.²

The principles and suggestions introduced in this sermon are meant to serve as instructive examples. No one should employ all of these standards all of the time, but informed preachers will have enough knowledge of them to use those most appropriate for the text and task at hand. Just as a musician practices scales to develop the skills for more nuanced compositions, preachers who have knowledge and mastery of these basic components of sermon structure are best prepared to alter, adapt, mix, or reject them in order to take the approach most appropriate for their particular text, congregation, and circumstance.

1. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); hereinafter *CCP*.

2. For the typical length of components of a traditional thirty-minute message, see *CCP*, 350–51.

These structural components are the working tools of experienced preachers. My goal in presenting them is to outfit the tool bag of starting preachers. In later examples we will alter the use of these tools and explore new techniques, but for now the goal is to create familiarity with the “hammer and nails” of traditional sermon construction. The reason for starting with the basics is simple: it is very unusual to find a skilled preacher who does not have a working knowledge of standard sermon components such as introductions, propositions, main points, illustrations, applications, and conclusions.

Natural talent and instinct are certainly sufficient for some preachers of special gifting. But for most of us, slowing down long enough to learn these tools of our trade is the wisest approach, though it may seem constraining at first. The finest craft usually will come from those who best know their materials, tools, and options, even though they will not expect to use them all in every project.

This first sermon is *expository*, meaning that it explains a particular passage of Scripture by clarifying the main and subordinate ideas of the author in the context of the biblical passage and by applying these spiritual truths to our contemporary situations. The approach is *deductive*, meaning that it moves from the development of general principles to the statement of particular applications (*inductive* sermons move in the opposite direction). The text itself is from a *didactic* (i.e., teaching through thought development) portion of a New Testament epistle. Later we will explore other approaches to other types of biblical literature (e.g., historical narrative, prophecy, poetry).

Proclaim His Word

2 Timothy 4:1–5

[Note: Words in brackets below are *not* said out loud but are shown here to indicate how various sermon components are used as a traditional sermon progresses.]

[**Announce text**] Please look with me in Scripture at 2 Timothy 4:1–5.¹

[**Scripture introduction**]² Paul’s second letter to Timothy was written near the end of the apostle’s life. Realizing that he must pass the baton of his ministry, Paul gives this charge to Timothy, a young minister who is facing many of the same questions and fears we will face as ministers today.³

[**Reannounce and read text**] Read with me these words of equipping from 2 Timothy 4:1–5. [The preacher reads the Scripture passage out loud.]

[**Prayer for illumination**] Pray with me as we ask God to guide us in the study of his Word. [The minister offers a brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to bless the understanding of the preacher and hearers as God’s Word is proclaimed.]

1. I wish to express my thanks to former students Rev. John Gullet and Rev. Norm Reed for their initial writing and formatting of this example sermon in their seminary days. In years following their graduation from Covenant Seminary, I have continued to edit and modify this work to demonstrate various aspects of formal sermon structure.

2. The nature and aspects of the Scripture introduction are discussed in *CCP*, 249–51.

3. Note that the Scripture introduction includes a brief explanation of the *context* of the text and a brief tie of the themes of the text to our situation in order to *create longing* in the listener for the message that follows. Note that most of the listeners are those training or considering training to become preachers (or their spouses).

[**Introduction**]⁴ As she listened to her neighbor’s brazen confession, my mother’s worst fears about her friend and neighbor were sadly confirmed. My mother had witnessed a growing relationship with another man that seemed dangerous and inappropriate for this married friend that I will only identify as “Betty.” So, to protect her friend and to try, if possible, to correct her, my mother decided she had to say something. Tentative questions of concern were met with surprising candor from Betty. “It’s all right,” she said. “You don’t need to be worried. God has graciously led me to this new relationship. I’ll be so much happier with a new husband.”

My mother left the conversation shaken by Betty’s callous disregard for her marriage. She was sad about Betty’s choices but also afraid for her. My mother knew that if Betty continued on her present course, God would not ignore her abandonment of her marriage vows and her abuse of his grace. Ultimately he would **judge**⁵ the **sin**. Betty needed to hear the correction of God’s **Word**, as well as the grace he offers to those who repent. The hard question with which my mother wrestled was this: “How can I warn my friend that God **judges sin** and yet provide her with hope in the help he offers?” As that wrestling continued internally, my mother confessed later that she struggled to say anything externally.

How would you respond in such a situation? My mother’s account reminds us that an opportunity to proclaim the truths of God’s **Word** can arise at any time. For his **purposes**, God continually places us in situations in which we can help others by carefully and faithfully applying the **Word** of God. But *most of us struggle to speak up with clarity and conviction when God calls us to this **purpose** despite our knowledge that God will **judge** [FCF].*⁶ Questions about what to say and how to say it silence us. But we can overcome our hesitations by learning from Paul’s charge to proclaim God’s Word in 2 Timothy chapter 4 [**Scripture bond**].⁷ Instead of making God’s **judgment** a cause for question, Paul makes it a source for motivation, indicating that . . . [the preacher now states the following proposition]

4. The content and structure of a formal sermon introduction are discussed in *CCP*, chap. 9.

5. The boldface indicates how key words of both phrases of the sermon’s proposition appear in the introduction to ready the ear of the listener for the concepts and terms that will capture the major themes of the message.

6. The fallen condition focus (FCF) is a negative aspect of the human condition that the truths of the passage will address with biblical instruction and the hope of the gospel. The preacher typically states the FCF (or burden of the text) in the introduction so the listeners know the specific struggle the sermon will address (and will long for corresponding application). See *CCP*, 48–54 and 240–43.

7. For description of the Scripture bond component of the sermon introduction, see *CCP*, 244.

[**Proposition**]⁸ Because God will **judge sin**, we must **proclaim** his **Word** for the **purposes** he intends.

Paul first gives a solemn context for the purposes of proclaiming God's Word. He writes to Timothy in verse 1, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom."⁹ Everything we do is "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge."¹⁰ In light of the divine oversight of the One who will hold everyone accountable, Paul urges the proclamation of God's Word for these purposes: to rescue the needy, to defend the truth, and to fulfill our duty.¹¹ First Paul tells us that . . .

[**Main point 1**] Because God will judge sin,¹² we must proclaim his Word to rescue the needy.¹³

People's needs vary, so Paul's instruction for the proclamation of God's Word varies accordingly as the apostle addresses the needs of those who do not believe God's Word, those who do not obey God's Word, and those who have lost confidence in God's Word.¹⁴

[**Subpoint 1**] How should we approach those who do not believe God's Word? We should convince them.¹⁵

8. For discussion of the reasons for and content of a formal sermon proposition, see *CCP*, 143–49.

9. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this sermon are from the New King James Version.

10. With this contextualization, the preacher is also establishing the proof or truth of the "anchor clause" of the proposition and main points. Such establishment typically happens just before or after the proposition; in this case it occurs both before and after (see *CCP*, 150).

11. Key phrases from all of the sermon's main points are used here as a "billboard" to indicate the major thought divisions that are coming in the remainder of the message. For a further explanation of "billboards," see *CCP*, 264–65.

12. In this formally worded main point, the anchor clause remains consistent (unchanging) with the anchor clause of the proposition to signal the ear of the listener that the proposition's main theme will now be developed. For discussion of the structural components (e.g., anchor and magnet clauses) of formal main points, see *CCP*, 135–43 and 149–51.

13. The magnet clause of the main point changes the *key terms* of the parallel clause in the proposition to indicate specifically how the theme of the proposition will develop in this main point. These key-term changes draw the attention of the listener to the new thought development they indicate and thus also are the focus of the subpoints. The subpoints support and/or develop the thought of the magnet clause. For discussion of the types (e.g., analytical-question responses, interrogatives, bullets) of subpoints, see *CCP*, 156–61.

14. Note the billboard that also occurs after the statement of the main point to prepare the listener for the coming subpoints. Billboards are *not* needed in every main point (and always using them would be tedious for the listener), but they are frequently helpful (see *CCP*, 264–65).

15. The subpoints under this main point are worded as interrogatives. Each successive question sets up an answer containing the key words and concepts that will be proven or supported from the biblical text.

Paul says to Timothy in verse 2, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” The first task listed that those proclaiming God’s Word should “be ready” to do is “convince.” Paul has just reminded Timothy in verse 16 of chapter 3 that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Scripture has this divine and authoritative character because it is God’s means to rescue sinful people from the judgment to come. The God who will judge sin also mercifully provides the gospel whose truths redeem those who believe it. Therefore, Paul gives the highest priority to using Scripture—the Word inspired by God—to convince others of its truths.

Such convincing may require us to explain the meaning or defend the credibility of God’s Word. These matters almost always require great patience and careful teaching, so Paul further reminds Timothy that he must be prepared to convince others, “with all longsuffering and teaching.” In other words, convincing others requires our reflecting to them the same patience and care God exhibited in redeeming us. Those who do not believe God’s Word must be convinced by those of us to whom he has revealed his truth and in whom his truth now lives.

But not only the unconvinced need the proclamation of the gospel.

[Subpoint 2] How should we approach those who do not obey God’s Word?
We should **rebuke** them.

There are those who know but do not obey. Those who believe the right things can still fall into error. In verse 2 Paul also tells us how to respond to these people. There he instructs, “rebuke” with “longsuffering and teaching.” Rebuking involves identifying wrongdoing as being wrong. There are times when we must confront others and tell them directly to stop disobeying or distorting or even denying God’s Word. As Jesus says in Luke 17:3, “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”

Not every wrong needs rebuke all the time—“love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8)—but rebuke must be in the arsenal of faithful proclaimers of God’s Word. When people ignore the clear teaching of the Word, we must be

The answer comes immediately after the interrogative and then is proven and developed in the explanation of the text that follows. The answer also holds the key word(s) of the subpoint that will be the focus of this main point’s illustration and application.

willing to warn them of the consequences of continuing down the wrong path. If God did not love his children, he would not warn them of the dangers of their sin. Yet because he does love, God does warn, and he uses faithful proclaimers of his Word to warn others through rebuke that is intended to rescue them from the horrible consequences of unrepented sin.

[*Transition*] Some are unconvinced, some do not obey—Paul has addressed how to deal with each of these—but some also wander because they have lost confidence in the truths of God’s Word.

[**Subpoint 3**] How should we approach those who have lost confidence in God’s Word? We should **exhort** them.

Paul continues in verse 2 by commanding Timothy to “exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching.” People need to understand the importance, as well as the content, of what God’s Word requires. To “exhort” them means to urge them with the counsel of God’s Word to act upon the hope and strength that Christ offers. Our exhortation should direct God’s people to the assurances and “teaching” they need in order to do what he requires, even if it seems difficult. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that God himself exhorted the apostle in a time of trial by saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Because Jesus will judge humankind, we must proclaim God’s Word to those who need to be **convicted**, to those who need to be **rebuked**, and to those who need to be **exhorted**.¹⁶

[*Illustration*] The Cuban Resettlement Camp in Key Largo, Florida, was abuzz one morning. There were almost eight hundred Cuban refugees in the camp, and they all seemed to be anticipating someone’s imminent arrival. As the next busload of refugees from the Key West site arrived, seven older gentlemen in wheelchairs at last departed from the buses. The crowd, which normally was loud and exuberant at the arrivals’ newfound freedom, was silent and reverent, while at the same time extremely attentive to the needs of these seven. These were the seven prisoners of conscience who never denied their faith in Jesus Christ. The first three were arrested for street preaching in the main park of Havana in the early 1960s, and

16. The summary of the explanation prior to the illustration uses the key terms of *all* the preceding subpoints, since the illustration illustrates them *all*. If the illustration were only for one of the subpoints, then the summary would include the key terms of only that particular subpoint. The use of illustrations is discussed in chap. 7 of *CCP* (esp. 194 and 197).

the others were arrested for openly carrying their Bibles across that same park as a signal to others of an underground church meeting.

For their faith these seven endured decades of imprisonment and brutal torture, which had left them crippled and disfigured. Despite multiple broken bones, they refused to renounce their Savior and to swear allegiance to the atheistic communist regime. In the following weeks, the camp officials noticed that these seven would hold religious services every morning, afternoon, and evening in which many would be **convicted**¹⁷ of their sins upon hearing the gospel message for the first time. The seven also openly **rebuked** the sins of individuals with firmness, confidence, and love as they gave instruction on the keys of the Christian life through the study of the Word. But the most impressive acts of these seven involved the **exhortation** they provided in others' times of weakness and despair. The seven had learned such faithful ministry in their Cuban prison. There, through both silent suffering and open rejoicing in God's grace, these men of faith had **exhorted** many who had lost hope. They also **exhorted** each other with reminders of God's promises when anyone felt weak, as well as rejoiced when anyone felt the strength of God coursing through them.

These seven, who had every right to be bitter, were rejoicing that they had been counted among the body of Christ in a Christless land and that they were now free again to proclaim the Word of God to a searching people through words and actions that **convicted, rebuked, and exhorted**. The devotion of these men to one another and their commitment to helping others understand God's Word display well the faithfulness that God desires of us to rescue the needy.

[*Application*] We who would proclaim God's Word to needy persons must also become able handlers of the tools of **convincing, rebuking, and exhorting**.¹⁸

If we really want to **convince** others to honor God's Word, then we must faithfully encourage one another to remember that we live in the presence and sight of God and that, as his children, we are to live by the standards of his Word. Such proclamation does not only have to be the responsibility of professional ministers—in

17. Key terms of the subpoint statements "rain" down into the illustration. This term consistency makes it obvious that the illustration focuses on the concepts of the subpoints. For the nature and importance of "expositional rain," see *CCP*, 197 and 224–25.

18. Key terms of the subpoint statements also "rain" down into the application (application is discussed in chap. 8 of *CCP*). This term consistency makes it obvious that the preacher is applying what the message proved the text was about (and not extraneous ideas), thus giving the application relevance to the text and authority from the text.

fact, it should not only be the responsibility of pastors. Those of you who still are in secular college settings may already have a great opportunity to be involved in a ministry of proclaiming God's Word. Not only are the opposition and temptations you face daily on a college campus much easier to overcome when you become involved in Christian fellowship, but by being so involved you also help **convince** others that faithfulness is possible in such a challenging environment.

Such **convincing** may not result simply from the life you live. You do not have to be on a secular campus long to know that Christianity is often openly opposed by professors and students. When the truth of God is challenged in your classes, God may call you to **convince** those challengers of their error. If you find yourself puzzled and doubting, seek out fellow believers who can **convincingly** help you answer the false ideas with which you are being bombarded. Sometimes you may feel isolated and strange because of your beliefs. It is times like these when you may need to find those who can also **exhort** or even **rebuke** you. I don't say this to be harsh, but rather to acknowledge that all of us can be tempted to despair or apathy in the face of opposition to God's Word. We need God's Word, and we need each other to be faithful proclaimers of its truth.

But college students aren't the only ones who are called to faithful proclamation of God's Word.¹⁹ All of us, whether we are at home, at church, or at work, are called to the same concern—because we are called to care for others who need God's Word. When a friend in your small group falls into sin that he or she will not acknowledge, you must be willing lovingly to **rebuke**. Husbands and wives, when your spouse is discouraged and weighed down with children's tasks or distasteful work or a crazy schedule, you must be there lovingly to **exhort** and encourage with God's Word. When the coworker with whom you have been sharing the gospel expresses doubts about the Christian faith, you must be ready, with the Holy Spirit's help, to **convince** them of the reasons for the hope that you have. We have many opportunities to proclaim God's Word to needy people, and knowing that we live before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge them and us, will motivate us strongly to proclaim God's Word in accord with God's purposes.

[**Transition**] Just as there are situations in which we must be prepared to **convince**, **rebuke**, and **exhort** for the sake of those who need the truth, the apostle

19. The college student example provided a concrete application for the truths previously explained. Now the preacher "unrolls" other application examples more briefly to indicate that the truths of this main point also apply to other people and situations. For a discussion of unrolling application, see *CCP*, 224–27.

Paul also challenges us to be prepared to defend God’s Word for those who have embraced falsehood.²⁰

[**Main point 2**] Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim his Word to defend the truth.²¹

[**Analytical question**] When must we defend the truth?²²

[**Subpoint 1**] When others **abandon sound doctrine**.

At the beginning of verse 3, Paul warns Timothy about a reaction some people will have to the proclamation of God’s Word: “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.” Paul addressed the core problem of turning away from truth in Romans chapter 1 while writing about the nature of the ungodly. Paul says, “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (v. 25 NIV). The prophet Isaiah wrote similarly concerning those who abandon the truth in chapter 30, verse 10, saying, “They say to the seers, ‘See no more visions!’ and to the prophets, ‘Give us no more visions of what is right!’ Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions” (NIV). This consistent theme across the Scriptures should alert us that in all ages there is great temptation to turn from truth to lies that temporarily seem more satisfying. Our day is no different, and because God wants to prepare us to proclaim his Word, he has warned us in advance that many people will not respond faithfully. We, therefore, must be prepared for people to abandon sound doctrine.

Being prepared for people to abandon what is sound requires us to anticipate others teaching what is false. Therefore, we must also defend the truth . . .²³ [With this transition that echoes the analytical question before subpoint 1, continue to the statement of the next subpoint.]

[**Subpoint 2**] When others **honor false teachers**.

20. These few lines of transition *review* what has been said previously and *preview* what comes next. For a further explanation of transitions, see *CCP*, 262–65.

21. In this formally worded outline, the second main point maintains the wording of the proposition’s anchor clause and indicates new focus by the changes in key terms in the magnet clause.

22. The following subpoints are set up by a single analytical question that each will answer in turn.

23. The essential wording of the opening analytical question reappears as transition, setting up each subsequent subpoint and conceptually tying the whole main point together.

Paul continues in verse 3 by saying, “Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim. 4:3 NIV). In Matthew 24:5, Jesus also indicates this can happen by saying, “For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many” (NIV). We all love teachers who tell us what we want to hear and who make us feel good about ourselves by not requiring us to question beliefs or practices with which we have grown comfortable. Many people flock to one type of teacher or another because that person makes them feel happy or satisfied with themselves. Because people are apt to listen to such things, there is never a lack of false teachers.

Not only must we defend the truth when others abandon sound doctrine and when others honor false teachers, but also . . .

[Subpoint 3] When others will not even listen.

Paul tells Timothy in verse 4, “They will turn their ears away from the truth” (NIV). In the midst of this passage where Timothy is being encouraged to preach the Word in every situation, Paul writes to him honestly of those who will not listen at all. Yet, though they may not even listen, Paul still commands Timothy to preach the Word.

Luke describes such a situation in Acts chapter 17 where a mob forms against Paul in Thessalonica and then follows him to Berea. Those in Berea were willing to search the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying about the Christ was true. But the mob from Thessalonica and those in Berea who were influenced by them were unwilling to listen, regardless of what Scripture said and regardless of Paul’s proclamation. The circumstances were challenging but not so hard as to dissuade Paul from going on to proclaim God’s Word at his next stop, Athens—where, again, some would listen and some would not.

Such accounts remind us that though others may **abandon what is sound, honor what is false**, and “turn their ears away from the truth” so as **not even to listen**, we still have an obligation to “preach the Word.”²⁴

[Illustration] As he stood before the church court on the afternoon of April 18, 1521, Martin Luther was asked one question: “Will you recant of your writings

24. Note again the summary of key terms of all the subpoints, preparing for the illustration that uses them all.

and the errors which they contain?” After spending the night in prayer, searching for the right thing to say, he answered, “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.” Martin Luther believed the Word of God required him to stand for the truth even in such a difficult situation. He knew that though others might **abandon sound doctrine**,²⁵ he must stand firm. While his human judges had the power to excommunicate, exile, or even execute him, he knew the Judge in heaven would declare the most important verdict. Thus, Luther said, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” Luther believed that the church had succumbed to honoring **false teachers**, and knowing that they very probably would **not even listen**, he still answered his accusers by saying, “Here I stand.” He viewed himself as ultimately responsible only to a divine Judge, and it motivated him to remain faithful to proclaim God’s Word in the most challenging of situations. You and I have a very similar calling in this day and age when truth is “relative” to most people and “tolerance” for so many kinds of evils is encouraged. Defending the truth in our day can be dangerous to our friendships, reputations, and careers, but we too should stand in our day, knowing that one day we will stand before the One who judges the living and the dead.

[*Application*] Paul wrote this letter to a young pastor in Ephesus, a major city of Greco-Roman culture that was filled with many false religions and philosophies. But the words still apply as directly to us as they did to Timothy. Every day we are faced with spiritual challenges, and we must regularly decide whether we will defend the truth. Certainly Paul’s warnings apply to the challenges we face from false religions around us and doctrinal battles in the church. But the challenges to spiritual truth are not limited to the “religious” realms of our world.

In the business world there can be pressure from every side to **abandon doctrinally sound ethics** because they are supposedly the “old-fashioned” way of doing things. Numerous well-publicized examples of scandals among corporations with formerly solid reputations make it clear that “whatever it takes to succeed” was recently the ethic guiding entire companies—even entire industries. Whether dealing with the need to show a profit, the hiring and firing of employees, or simply gaining

25. Key terms of the subpoints “rain” into the illustration for term and concept consistency.

the approval of peers, believers in the workplace often find themselves in situations in which unethical behavior is not only overlooked but expected. Christians may find themselves working for supervisors who **will not even listen** to alternatives. In these situations we must not succumb to the herd mentality that **honors false teachers** with their vain assurances of easy success because “Everyone is doing it” or “It’s necessary.” The battle for faithfulness to God’s Word is not as often fought in grand church councils as it is in daily work decisions.

In a culture of pervasive ethical compromise, rising above the current tide of **abandoned truth** has become difficult in every avenue of life. From the corporate executive who is offered a handsome bonus if she will look the other way on a shady deal, to the student who is encouraged by his peers to cheat on the big exam. From the church official asked to fudge on enrollment numbers, to the fifth grader urged by friends to download bootlegged music. How many heads would turn and mouths hang wide open if in those situations Christians were to say, “I can’t do this because to do so would violate the Word of God”? I will not tell you that such a proclamation of God’s Word will meet with everyone’s approval. I cannot promise you that others **will even listen**. But I can promise you that God will be honored by those who stand for him, and there will be souls safe in eternity because they have witnessed sacrificial faithfulness that is a beacon of truth. Knowing this, may you and I be motivated to say with Martin Luther, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God,’ and I will stand for the truth **even when others do not listen**.”

[**Transition**] The Lord has definitely given us a challenge in the words of Paul by calling us to defend the truth. But the apostle doesn’t stop there. He goes on to tell us *how* to do this task. Paul reinforces his commands by reminding us that . . .²⁶

[**Main point 3**] Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim his Word to fulfill our duty.²⁷

And how does the apostle Paul say that we are to fulfill our duty? By **being watchful**, by **enduring affliction**, and by **doing the work of an evangelist**.²⁸

26. This transition between main points does not use the classic “not only . . . but also . . .” language, but the conceptual progression is the same—i.e., reviewing past concepts and setting up those that will follow.

27. In this formally worded outline, the third main point maintains the wording of the proposition’s anchor clause and indicates new focus by the changes in key terms in the magnet clause.

28. Here an analytical question sets up a billboard of the following subpoints that will be presented as bullet statements in the development of the third main point.

[**Subpoint 1**] We must be **watchful**.

In verse 5 Paul commands Timothy to be watchful. The apostle writes, “But you, keep your head in all situations” (NIV). The literal meaning is to “be sober” or to “be clearheaded.” Paul commands us not to lose our focus or composure but rather always to be watchful for both opposition and opportunities that would affect our fulfillment of Christ’s purposes. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul similarly writes,

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ. . . . Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversations be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Col. 4:2–6 NIV)

So be clear in your thinking, not distracted or overly distressed by your circumstances, so that you may be watchful for the gospel opportunities God is providing. God gives his people many different kinds of opportunities to make his truth known. People may ask you questions such as, “How can you be so joyful? How can you have such hope in the midst of such difficulty? Why don’t you take the shortcuts that others do? Why do your children obey you? Why do you so honor your spouse?” If you walk with Jesus, there are many ways that you will stand out in this fallen world. So if you are watchful, God will use the questions others have about you to tell them about him.

[*Illustration*] About three years ago, God allowed me the opportunity to get to know someone who was indeed always **watchful**—a man who wonderfully fulfilled his duty of proclaiming God’s Word to the lost.²⁹ His name was Chuck. He was an older gentleman in my church who began Bible studies in his home. He would teach anyone who would listen. He taught me many things about God’s Word in those studies, but probably the greatest thing he taught me was the importance of **watching** for opportunities to share Jesus Christ with others. He was always **watching** for someone who did not know about God’s grace so that he could tell them about it.

About a year ago Chuck was diagnosed with cancer. It spread quickly, and within a few short months he found himself lying in a hospital, waiting to die. But even

29. In this third main point, the illustration is moved higher to separate it from the conclusion’s illustration (as discussed in *CCP*, 258). Note also that the illustration is only about the first subpoint, so the only key terms that “rain” into the illustration are from that subpoint alone.

in that difficult situation, even in the midst of his pain and this terrible physical challenge, he was sober-minded about the opportunities God was providing. He remained **watchful** for gospel opportunities. He discovered that some of the nurses who continually came to check on him were not believers. So he patiently and lovingly shared God's Word with them. Chuck died just a few weeks later. But two of the nurses who had cared for Chuck and had heard him talk so openly about his faith came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Just as Chuck was always **watchful** to see how he might meet challenges to the gospel and how he might make the most of opportunities for the gospel, so we too must also be **watchful**. But God may require more than watchfulness of us, even as he required more of my friend, Chuck.

Not only must we be watchful, but also like Chuck . . .

[**Subpoint 2**] We must be willing to **endure hardship**.

Continuing in verse 5, Paul writes, "Endure afflictions." This must be one of Paul's most personally challenging commands. Remember the setting of this letter: the apostle is in prison, bound in chains, and waiting to be executed. Paul knew all about afflictions. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul writes, "Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked. . . . I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles. . . . I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food" (2 Cor. 11:24–27 NIV). All for the sake of the gospel!

Now, you may think, "I really don't plan on being stoned or shipwrecked." Yet in 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul writes, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (NIV). It's a guarantee and a promise. You will suffer hardships and afflictions if you live for Christ. But recall verse 2 in our passage. God has given us his Word—the very words he breathed out. The same breath of wisdom and love that breathed life into the original man also provided and pervades God's Word, so that we might always have the wisdom and love of God to encourage us. We are able to endure in ministering God's Word not only because it represents his truth but also because it reflects his character. God ministers to us the reality of who he is as we minister his Word to others. Thus, by proclaiming God's Word, the power of his Spirit and the realities of his Son

invade our circumstances, embrace our hearts, and strengthen our wills for the work that must be done. This shouldn't surprise us because the spiritual reality is that when we proclaim the Word of God, the living Word—Christ himself—is present ministering to us by his Spirit and truth.

When my friend Chuck was dying of cancer, he felt that he was best able to proclaim God's Word to the nurses at the hospital. This wasn't just because he knew heaven was near for him. Rather, through Chuck's ministering the truths of Christ, the Lord also became more powerful and present to him. Chuck's afflictions had stripped away the temporary comforts of this world, so the truths of the Word became even more dear to him. And as he proclaimed those truths with greater love, they also became more real to him, making his witness to others even more powerful. Perhaps this is why Paul waits until after telling us to endure hardship to let us know the last duty of faithful proclaimers of God's Word: doing the work of an evangelist.

[Subpoint 3] We must work as evangelists.

In the remainder of verse 5 Paul writes, "Do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (NIV). You may not think of yourself as an evangelist. But when you share with a lost friend the way Jesus encourages you and comforts you in times of trouble, you are indeed engaged in evangelism. When you talk to a coworker while playing racquetball at the gym about how God has radically changed your life and your marriage, you are engaged in evangelism. When you tell your child, "Jesus loves you," you are engaged in evangelism. Such engagements are in God's plan and purpose. He calls us to make the most of every opportunity. People's souls are at stake. Jesus will judge all people, but he extends his mercy through us to others. God's Word has the amazing power to change eternity for those who believe its truths. We must proclaim these truths so that Christ's message may be heard and believed. This is more than our duty; it is the privilege of being collaborators with Jesus in the eternal salvation of those who are in danger of hell apart from him.

[Application] The application of these verses is probably obvious for those in church ministry occupations. I hope that there are other implications that are now becoming clear for every believer. For example, some of you are stay-at-home moms, and your days often seem completely chaotic: chasing children around

the house, running endless errands, and doing all sorts of other things that may seem far removed from proclaiming God's Word. But consider the duties you are fulfilling in the apostle Paul's terms. By all the hard work you do to serve your family, friends, and neighbors, you **endure hardship** in service to Christ. By being concerned for their spiritual welfare and taking opportunities to speak of Jesus to friends and to your own children, you **work as an evangelist**. By monitoring the hearts and actions of every person around you to see when a word of testimony, encouragement, or correction should be given, you remain **watchful** for God's opportunities. By ministering in these ways to your family, your children, and your neighbors, you fulfill your duty of proclaiming God's Word in every situation.

In so ministering, you also teach others to do the same. By showing children that God's Word is real and exciting and that it comforts us in the midst of afflictions, you teach them to be **watchful**. By thinking of ways to model Christ's servant heart and to show love to those around you—neighbors, the woman who works at the deli counter, or the person who cuts your family's hair—your children learn the **work of evangelism**, and they may also learn what it means to **endure hardship** while you are there to help them through it.

Such opportunities to fulfill God's purposes exist for us in the myriad situations of life, if we will only remain **watchful**. Moms at home, students at college, those in professional careers—all have the opportunities to **work** and to **endure** for Christ's name. God does not isolate us from others, and we should always be considering the evangelistic opportunities given to us. Who admires you and looks to you for guidance? Who rubs elbows with you? Who enjoys your company? Who does business with you? These people are your responsibility—your duty—because God has put them in your life. Consider how you can share Christ with them. By God's grace and by the power of his Holy Spirit that dwells in you, others will know of him through you!

[*Conclusion*]³⁰ The just God who judges sin, through Paul, has laid before us a high and holy charge that will require serious commitment from all of us. In his grace, God has called us, motivated us, and enabled us to overcome our fears so that we may proclaim his Word to fulfill his purposes.³¹ God has called you to **fulfill your duty** to speak of him by putting in your heart the concern to proclaim

30. For discussion of the nature and content of a conclusion, see *CCP*, chap. 9.

31. Note the terms of this sentence and others in the conclusion echo the terms of the proposition, giving the entire sermon a sense of unity and clear purpose.

the truth to rescue the needy and to defend the truth against those who would deny it to the spiritually needy.³²

The enabling presence of Jesus has been clearly seen in the difficult situation that my mother faced with her friend Betty.³³ Although my mother is not a naturally gifted evangelist, the Lord has used her to speak the truth faithfully and lovingly to seek to convince Betty to turn from her sin. Over many months, my mother has patiently but firmly exhorted Betty from God's Word. My mother was even bold enough to detail the consequences of Betty's unfaithfulness in the hope that such loving rebuke would turn Betty from her sin. There were times when it was obvious Betty was determined to abandon the truth, and there were times when she would not even listen, but my mother continued to fulfill her duty and to defend God's truth in order to rescue the person in need.

We don't yet know what the final chapter of Betty's story will be. But for now Betty is still with her family, still in her marriage, and still talking to my mother. Though only the Lord knows the full story of Betty's life, another story has already unfolded in the life of my mother. By fulfilling her gospel duties with courage and care, my mother possesses the joy and blessing of a clear conscience toward Betty. In addition, by doing the work of an evangelist, my mother has been strengthened and encouraged to speak God's Word with more confidence than ever before. The gospel has become more real and precious to my mother because the reality of God's judgment has motivated her to share the message of God's grace with her neighbor.

You and I can also know this reality more deeply as we faithfully proclaim God's Word to those in our lives. As we rehearse what God has done for us by sending his Son to rescue us from judgment, his grace becomes fresh motivation to obey him and to speak of him. May this grace now motivate you to be his instrument of salvation in every context in which he places you. Proclaim his Word to fulfill his purposes for your life.

32. Key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points reappear in the conclusion to act as a concise summary of the entire message (see *CCP*, 254–55).

33. This sermon concludes with a "wraparound" illustration, finishing the account that began the sermon in order to provide a sense of intended direction, clear purpose, and definite closure (see *CCP*, 259).