**[Should pastors preach evangelistic sermons to their churches?](http://feedproxy.google.com/%7Er/BaylyblogOutOfOurMindsToo/%7E3/0YbKoEnd0p4/should-pastors-preach-evangelistic-sermons-to-their-churches.html" \t "_blank)**

**http://www.baylyblog.com/2010/05/tim-what-does-it-mean-for-a-new-church-plant-and-its-pastor-to-be-gospel-centered-well-it-means-the-guys-are-reading-all.html**

from [BaylyBlog: Out of our minds, too...](http://www.google.com/reader/view/feed/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.baylyblog.com%2Fatom.xml) by David & Tim Bayly

*(Tim)* Under "[What is Gospel-centered ministry, really...](http://www.baylyblog.com/2010/05/tim-what-does-it-mean-for-a-new-church-plant-and-its-pastor-to-be-gospel-centered-well-it-means-the-guys-are-reading-all.html)," there's been a lengthy series of exchanges in the comments concerning whether it's proper to preach evangelistic sermons to established churches. This is an exceedingly important discussion and I want to encourage readers to go down and read those comments in their proper context. But knowing some won't go there, here is my most recent response which can, to some degree, stand on its own. Whatever else you don't read, make sure not to pass over the critically important quote from Luther here recorded.

\* \* \*

Augustine said, "Many sheep without, many wolves within." From the founding of the Church, this has been the universal experience of pastors as we care for our flocks. Yes, the Epistles demonstrate a presumption that letters to believers are letters to believers. It's hard to imagine how they could have been written otherwise. "To those purporting to belong to Christ who are a part of that organization purporting to be a true church in Galatia?" It doesn't work.

But do the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles provide evidence that our Lord and His Apostles called the faith of those marked by the signs of the Covenant into question? The answer to that question is an emphatic, "Yes!" How long shall my list be? Think of those Christ contradicts telling them their father is not God, but the Devil (John 8:38 & ff.). And if we want to let ourselves off the hook by dismissing Christ as our paradigm for pastoral care today under the rubric of His omniscience, let's move to the Apostolic warning given to Simon Magus in Acts 8. Or on to the many exhortations to baptized believers recorded in the Epistles carefully calculated to warn against and expose presumption--including the Letters to the Seven Churches (eg. Revelation 3:1-6).

So yes, we are to preach to our people normally addressing them as true believers. But we also must test ourselves to see if we are in the faith, calling our flock to follow us in this discipline...

"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test" 2 Corinthians 13:5)? That one simple statement to the Corinthians is all we need to understand the work before us.

And this isn't to mention the situation for most of us that we regularly have men and women under our in-the-church preaching who make no claim to Christian faith--they matter, too, don't they?

How we walk and preach and teach through these things, pastorally, is something each of us has to face before the Lord, week by week. It's not easy to do so without furthering the error of overly-tender consciences who fail to stand in our Holy Faith, confident in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Such overly tender consciences are a constant in ministry and must receive our careful pastoral ministry.

But I'm convinced a larger error among Reformed pastors today is that we never preach the fear of God, the Law of God, the Last Judgment, and the necessity of fleeing spiritual presumption by testing the sincerity of our faith. That's the error most of us need to flee.

For more on this from Luther, here's an excerpt from his "Instructions for Parish Visitors:"

In regard to doctrine we observe especially this defect that, while some preach about the faith by which we are to be justified, It is still not clearly enough explained how one shall attain to this faith, and almost all omit one aspect of the Christian faith without which no one can understand what faith is or means. For Christ says in the last chapter of Luke [24:47] that we are to preach in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood with out repentance. It follows that If we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people Imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. This would be a greater error and sin than all the errors hitherto prevailing. Surely we need to be concerned lest, as Christ says In Matt. 12 [:45] the last state becomes worse than the first.

Therefore we have instructed and admonished pastors that it is their duty to preach the whole gospel and not one portion without the other. For God says in Deut. 4 [:2]: “You shall not add to the word. . . nor take from it? There are preachers who now attack the pope because of what he has added to the Scriptures, which unfortunately is all too true. But when these do not preach repentance, they tear out a great part of Scripture. They have very little good to say about the eating of meat and the like, though they should not keep silent when they have an opportunity to defend Christian liberty against tyranny. What else is this than what Christ says in Matt. 23 [:24]: “Straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel?"

So we have admonished them to exhort the people diligently and frequently to repent and grieve over their sins and to fear the judgment of God. Nor are they to neglect the greatest and most important element of repentance, for both John and Christ condemned the Pharisees more severely for their hypocritical holiness than for ordinary sins. The preachers are to condemn the gross sins of the common man, but more rigorously demand repentance where there is false holiness....

The preachers are to proclaim and explain the Ten Commandments often and earnestly, yet not only the commandments but also how God will punish those who do not keep them and how he often has inflicted temporal punishment. For such examples are written In order to forewarn people, for instance, how the angels spoke to Abraham in Gen. 19 [:12f.], and told how God would punish Sodom and destroy it with the fire of hell. For they knew that he would tell it to his descendants so that they would learn to fear God.

So too they are to point out and condemn various specific vices. as adultery, drunkenness, envy, and hate, and how God has punished these, indicating that without doubt after this life he will punish still more severely if there is not improvement here.

The people are thus to be urged and exhorted to fear God, to repent and show contrition, lest their ease and life of false security be punished. Therefore Paul says In Rom. 3 [:20]: “Through the law comes (only) knowledge of sin.” True repentance is nothing but an acknowledgment of sin.

Then it is important that faith be preached. Whoever experiences grief and contrition over his sins should believe that his sins are forgiven, not on account of his merits, but on account of Christ.

When the contrite and fearful conscience experiences peace, comfort, and joy on hearing that his sins are forgiven because of Christ, then faith Is present—the faith that makes him righteous before God. We are to teach the people diligently that this faith cannot exist without earnest and true contrition and fear of God, as It is written in Psalm 110 Prov. 1 [:7], “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” And Isaiah says in the last chapter: "On whom does God look except on the trembling and contrite heart?"

This shall be proclaimed repeatedly, so that the people do not entertain false notions and think they have faith when they are far from having it. It shall be made clear that only If they have faith can they truly repent and grieve over their sins. Without repentance theirs is an imagined faith. True faith brings comfort and joy in God, and we do not feel such comfort and joy where there is no repentance or fearfulness, as Christ says in Matt. 11 [:5]: “The poor have good news preached to them.”

These two are the first elements of Christian life: Repentance or contrition and grief, and faith through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and are righteous before God. Both should grow and increase in us.

-from *Luther's Works; Volume 40; Church and Ministry II*; Edited by Conrad Bergendoff; Muhlenberg Press; Philadelphia; 1958; "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors"; pp. 274 ff.

So Luther commands the preaching of the Law as a method of awakening those without compunction of conscience. Where and when would Reformed pastors today do the same? I grieve to think some would call it spiritual abuse.

I've long maintained there's nothing more dangerous for a pastor's tenure than for him to warn unbelievers who have been rendered "without compunction of conscience" by unfaithful shepherds who coddled them by neglecting God's Law and warnings and never led them to true fear of God and repentance. And I'm convinced that many, if not most, evangelicals (including, and maybe especially, those in Reformed churches) are in the precise situation Luther here describes: they have been given over to an error "worse than all those hitherto prevailing." In other words, an error worse than the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Reformation.

Though I try, I can't escape the conviction that this is the true state of the Protestant church, today. We have removed the fear of God and are left with congregations filled with souls enslaved to greed, adultery, imaged idolatry, rebellion, and gossip all the while remaining entirely without compunction of conscience and eating at the Lord's Table with impunity, never obstructed in their presumption by loving and faithful shepherds.

Yes, there's always a danger of too-tender consciences, and we must work to assure such godly souls of the certainty of God's call and work through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. But such souls are exceptional in our wicked day when to be American and to be Christian are one and the same.

### What is Gospel-centered ministry, really...

(Tim) What does it mean for a church planter to tell us he's "Gospel-centered?" Well, it means he's reading all the Acts 29 and Redeemer stuff. You can't stand in succession without talking the talk. But assuming "Gospel-centered" is a good thing, what does it actually mean?

Let's have the Apostle Paul define it:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. ([*1 Corinthians 2:1-5*](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/1%20Corinthians%202.1-5))

If a church planter is Gospel-centered, he's determined to "know nothing among (his flock) except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Now two things, here.

First, the Apostle Paul is specific about the "nothing" he's determined not to know. He doesn't know superiority of speech or wisdom; he doesn't know strength, but weakness; he doesn't know confidence, but fear; he doesn't know how to cop a suave posture, but he trembles...

he doesn't know persuasive words of wisdom, but only the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and His power.

And why has he chosen this path of weakness, fear, and trembling as he hangs on the power of the Holy Spirit?

So that no one's faith would rest on him, but instead on the power of God.

In other words, if we communicate our strength and courage and erudition and confidence and hipness and cultural engagement and entrepreneurial moxie, we've destroyed the Gospel. When people leave our gatherings, they carry us rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What they depend upon and talk and write about is us; not the Cross of Jesus Christ. To put it bluntly, they're not at all Gospel-centered.

"But hey," you say, "it's all about God. It's all about the Cross!"

Really? Well then, let's move on to the second thing.

To know the Cross in its Holy Spirit power is to present four things, three of which are almost always missing from Gospel-centered men and the talks they give. **Here's** [**Buchanan**](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&ct=res&cd=1&ved=0CBYQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.rpts.edu%2Fmedia%2FDoctrineofJustification-Buchanan.pdf&ei=5Zj6S63HJ4SoNoXWvf4K&usg=AFQjCNG7xindqdKnBPc6aU0-CK3oCUMheg&sig2=tNVjOGliIMh9fx_S5AR29Q) **on those four things:**

* ...conscience continually prompts men to (ask)—'How shall man be just with God?' or, 'How can God be just,' and yet 'justify the ungodly?' That great problem may seldom occur to those that are habitually unmindful of God, and of their relation to Him; and should it be suggested to their minds, it will probably be lightly dismissed, as long as they cherish slight views of sin, and have little or no sense of their solemn responsibilities and prospects as subjects of the righteous government of God. Some vague opinion in regard to His general mercy, or some undefined purpose to propitiate His favour by future repentance and amendment of life, before they are brought face to face with the awful realities of death, and judgment, and eternity, may suffice, in the meantime, as an answer to the accusing voice of conscience, and as an opiate to allay its forebodings and fears. But minds in this state never grapple with any of the real difficulties of the problem, and can scarcely be said to have the slightest apprehension of its true meaning. They overlook all the most momentous conditions which are involved in it, and on which its right solution depends.

Now watch, here. Buchanan is about to present those **four momentous conditions that must form the structure of any true Gospel-centered preaching. Any** man seeking right standing with God or eternal life must come to know and love these four essentials for a right solution to man's pain-wracked conscience.

* The Gospel of Christ alone has presented that problem in all its magnitude, and in its just proportions; and the Gospel of Christ alone has offered a solution of it, based on a full view of the Attributes of God,—of the unalterable requirements of His Law,—of the principles and ends of His Moral Government,—and of the state, character, and prospects of man, as a dying yet immortal being, chargeable with past guilt, and still depraved by inherent sin.
* It lays a deep foundation for the doctrine of a sinner's pardon and acceptance with God, by revealing, in the first instance, the infinite holiness of God, His intense hatred of sin, His inflexible justice in punishing it,—the spiritual nature, the supreme authority, and unchangeable character of His law, as being, like Himself, 'holy, and just, and good,'— the principles and ends of His Moral Government, as a scheme which is designed and fitted to glorify His great Name, by manifesting, in their actual exercise, all the moral perfections of His nature, and making Himself known to His intelligent subjects as He really is,—the fallen, guilty, and depraved state of man, as a sinner, subject to condemnation, and utterly unable to save himself, while he is passing on, with the swiftness of time itself, to a state of strict and eternal retribution; and it is not till after it has revealed these great truths, which might seem to render his salvation hopeless, that it reveals a method of Grace and Redemption by which God Himself has solved the problem; and announces the stupendous fact, that He gave up His own Son,—to become incarnate, to assume the burden of our sins, to endure the punishment which these sins deserved, 'to shed His own precious blood for their expiation,—and all this that the Grace and the Justice of God might be made manifest, in their actual exercise, in the Cross of Christ...

**Maybe it's a bit much digesting Buchanan, so here's the summary.**

* If man is to believe the Gospel, he must know it. And if man is to know the Gospel, it's not enough for him to have slight thoughts of God's attributes, God's Moral Law, judgment, Heaven and Hell, and intimate thoughts of God's love and mercy, and Jesus' love and mercy and grace. Notice how Buchanan proceeds; the order is as important as the content.

**Any Gospel-centered shepherding or preaching will start with the attributes of God.**

* All of them in all their horror and beauty. And seeing the attributes of God will leave us trembling at the foot of Mt. Sinai where we receive God's Moral Law, which reveals even more clearly many of God's attributes, His perfections. So we start with the character, the attributes, the perfections of the Only True God. And this is no "God is for the city" vision. We're not close to that, yet.

**Then, we move to God's Law**. First, His attributes; second, His Law

* We preach the Law in all its brutal severity, trusting in the Holy Spirit to lead the souls under our care through that horror, to grace. But we trust so much in that horror, that we refuse to hop over it. Gospel-centered preaching never neglects the Schoolmaster that alone leads us to the Cross of Jesus Christ.

**First, the attributes of God**.

**Second, the Law of God**.

**And third, the coming judgment and the horrors of Hell prepared for all who have violated God's attributes and Law.**

* Again, only those who trust in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than themselves, their contextualization and entrepreneurial moxie, will preach and teach and counsel God's holiness and justice, His Law, and His coming throne of judgment driving every man to the eternity of Hell torments.

**Then Buchanan says this:**

**And fourth: The method of Grace and Redemption by which God Himself has solved the problem/ the cross**

* **...and it is not till after it has revealed these [first three] great truths, which might seem to render his salvation hopeless, that [Gospel-centered preaching] reveals a method of Grace and Redemption by which God Himself has solved the problem...**

Only when the first three truths have been firmly lodged in the hearts of the precious souls giving themselves to our care, will we give them the fourth great truth: that God in His great mercy and grace, has sent His Son to bear His wrath and justice for all who believe on Him. And those who believe will be justified freely by His grace, hearing a "not guilty" verdict at the Throne of God and being welcomed into His Holy Heaven.

How do we know if the souls under our care have been brought to the fourth through the first three Gospel truths?

Because of their attitude, their posture, and their words. They tremble. They cry out. They melt in tears. They fall on their faces. They turn red in the face and charge, fully intending to kill us.

Look across Scripture's Apostolic preaching (which is true Gospel-centered preaching) and see the response to the clear presentation of God's character, Law, judgment and Hell, and the Cross. When Stephen finished his Gospel-centered ministry, we read: "But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse" ([Acts 7:57](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/Acts%207.57)).

The Apostle Peter finishes his sermon on the Day of Pentecost with these words: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

And the souls under his ministry and care responded: "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'"

To which the Apostle Peter responded: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

But Peter didn't stop his Gospel-centered ministry quite yet. He continued in the same theme and direction he'd been going for quite some time already: "And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'"

So, was the Apostle Peter perfectly contextualized for the city of Jerusalem when he cried these words out to the assembled throng? Would any of us have thought he was Gospel-centered and "for his own city?"

It's almost laughable, isn't it?

But what happened? Was there fruit; and if so, how much? "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" ([Acts 2:36-41](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/Acts%202.36-41)).

Read the Apostle Paul's sermons--for instance, his sermon to the Areopagus in Athens--and you'll see these same four themes.

**So we learn two things about Gospel-centered preaching and ministry.**

* **First, that people leave it with little thoughts of us and large thoughts of God.** Their recollection of us will be that we are simple, trembling, direct, basic, afraid, but clinging to the power of the Holy Spirit.
* **And second, our hearers' large thoughts of God are disciplined in fou**r--not one or two or even three--directions:
  + **God's Character; or Attributes**
  + **God's Law**; \
  + **God’s Wrath**; (Charles put this term) man's eternal damnation fast approaching as his life quickly passes and he comes ever more closely to the Judgment seat of God and Hell; and then (and only then)
  + **God's mercy** in the Person and work of Jesus Christ Who was made a sin offering for sinful man that all who flee to Him might be saved.

May God give us a truly Gospel-centered ministry, weak and foolishly trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit so we never skip over the holiness of God's character, Law, and Judgment.

**But I bet a lot of people use "contextualize" to mean "adapting to the context so as to cause the minimum offense"**

**Tim, your post reminded me of chapter 13 of J.I. Packer's book, "Knowing God," on the Grace of God.**

Packer wonders why so many people in churches, though they profess to believe in grace, show no evidence of such. Talk to them about the church's air conditioning system or the church accounts and they're right with you. Talk to them of grace and they give you a look of "deferential blankness."

Why is this so? Packer mentions there are four truths that the doctrine of grace presupposes and if these truths "are not acknowledged and felt in one's heart, clear faith in God's grace becomes impossible." What are they? Note the similarity with Buchanan's four truths.

1. The moral ill-desert of man. Despite what man considers to be his "little peccadilloes," he holds to the "pagan" idea that he is basically good and never considers that he is actually a fallen, law-breaking rebel.

2. The retributive justice of God. Man exercises tolerance towards all sorts of evil and, in our "pagan way," we assume that God must do the same. It never occurs to him that God, in His goodness, and has created "a moral world in which retribution is as basic a fact as breathing." Those who do wrong have "no natural hope of anything from God but retributive judgment." And unless we feel this truth, we can "never share the biblical faith in divine grace."

3. The spiritual impotence of man. We hold to the essential tenet of "pagan religion" that we can repair our own relationship with God. Before we can really believe in God's grace, we must "bow to" the truth so well expressed by Toplady: "Not the labours of my hands, Can fulfill Thy law's demands. Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears for ever flow, All for sin could not atone, Thou must save and Thou alone."

4. The sovereign freedom of God. Old-time "paganism" had the idea that God needed us and our service and gifts. "Modern paganism" has the similar idea that God is obliged to help us out of our predicament. Nope. God is in no way dependent on us and is not "bound to show us favour." "Nobody forces His hand," and "only when it is seen that what decides each man's destiny is whether or not God resolves to save him from his sins, and that this is a decision which God need not make in any single case, can one begin to grasp the biblical view of grace."

All quotes from Packer 1973: pages 116-120.

Dear Matt,

Augustine said, "Many sheep without, many wolves within." From the founding of the Church, this has been the universal experience of pastors as we care for our flocks. Yes, the Epistles demonstrate a presumption that letters to believers are letters to believers. It's hard to imagine how they could have been written otherwise. "To those purporting to belong to Christ who are a part of that organization purporting to be a true church in Galatia?" It doesn't work.

But do the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles provide evidence that our Lord and His Apostles called the faith of those marked by the signs of the Covenant into question? The answer to that question is an emphatic, "Yes!" How long shall my list be? Think of those Christ contradicts telling them their father is not God, but the Devil ([John 8:38](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/John%208.38) & ff.). And if we want to let ourselves off the hook by dismissing Christ as our paradigm for pastoral care today under the rubric of His omniscience, let's move to the Apostolic warning given to Simon Magus in Acts 8. Or on to the many exhortations to baptized believers recorded in the Epistles carefully calculated to warn against and expose presumption--including the Letters to the Seven Churches (eg. [Revelation 3:1-6](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/Revelation%203.1-6)).

So yes, we are to preach to our people normally addressing them as true believers. But we also must test ourselves to see if we are in the faith, calling our flock to follow us in this discipline: "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test" ([2 Corinthians 13:5](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/2%20Corinthians%2013.5))? That one simple statement to the Corinthians is all we need to understand the work before us.

And this isn't to mention the situation for most of us that we regularly have men and women under our in-the-church preaching who make no claim to Christian faith--they matter, too, don't they?

How we walk and preach and teach through these things, pastorally, is something each of us has to face before the Lord, week by week. It's not easy to do so without furthering the error of overly-tender consciences who fail to stand in our Holy Faith, confident in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Such overly tender consciences are a constant in ministry and must receive our careful pastoral ministry.

But I'm convinced a larger error among Reformed pastors today is that we never preach the fear of God, the Law of God, the Last Judgment, and the necessity of fleeing spiritual presumption by testing the sincerity of our faith. That's the error most of us need to flee.

For more on this from Luther, here's an excerpt from his "Instructions for Parish Visitors:"

\* \* \*  
In regard to doctrine we observe especially this defect that, while some preach about the faith by which we are to be justified, It is still not clearly enough explained how one shall attain to this faith, and almost all omit one aspect of the Christian faith without which no one can understand what faith is or means. For Christ says in the last chapter of Luke [24:47] that we are to preach in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood with out repentance. It follows that If we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people Imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. This would be a greater error and sin than all the errors hitherto prevailing. Surely we need to be concerned lest, as Christ says In Matt. 12 [:45] the last state becomes worse than the first.

Therefore we have instructed and admonished pastors that it is their duty to preach the whole gospel and not one portion without the other. For God says in Deut. 4 [:2]: “You shall not add to the word. . . nor take from it? There are preachers who now attack the pope because of what he has added to the Scriptures, which unfortunately is all too true. But when these do not preach repentance, they tear out a great part of Scripture. They have very little good to say about the eating of meat and the like, though they should not keep silent when they have an opportunity to defend Christian liberty against tyranny. What else is this than what Christ says in Matt. 23 [:24]: “Straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel?"

So we have admonished them to exhort the people diligently and frequently to repent and grieve over their sins and to fear the judgment of God. Nor are they to neglect the greatest and most important element of repentance, for both John and Christ con demned the Pharisees more severely for their hypocritical holiness than for ordinary sins. The preachers are to condemn the gross sins of the common man, but more rigorously demand repentance where there is false holiness....

The preachers are to proclaim and explain the Ten Commandments often and earnestly, yet not only the commandments but also how God will punish those who do not keep them and how he often has inflicted temporal punishment. For such examples are written In order to forewarn people, for instance, how the angels spoke to Abraham in Gen. 19 [:12f.], and told how God would punish Sodom and destroy it with the fire of hell. For they knew that he would tell it to his descendants so that they would learn to fear God.

So too they are to point out and condemn various specific vices. as adultery, drunkenness, envy, and hate, and how God has punished these, indicating that without doubt after this life he will punish still more severely if there is not improvement here.

The people are thus to be urged and exhorted to fear God, to repent and show contrition, lest their ease and life of false security be punished. Therefore Paul says In Rom. 3 [:20]: “Through the law comes (only) knowledge of sin.” True repentance is nothing but an acknowledgment of sin.

Then it is important that faith be preached. Whoever experiences grief and contrition over his sins should believe that his sins are forgiven, not on account of his merits, but on account of Christ.

When the contrite and fearful conscience experiences peace, comfort, and joy on hearing that his sins are forgiven because of Christ, then faith Is present—the faith that makes him righteous before God. We are to teach the people diligently that this faith cannot exist without earnest and true contrition and fear of God, as It is written in Psalm 110 [[Ps. 111:10](http://bible.logos.com/passage/esv/Ps.%20111.10)] and Prov. 1 [:7], “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” And Isaiah says in the last chapter: "On whom does God look except on the trembling and contrite heart?"

This shall be proclaimed repeatedly, so that the people do not entertain false notions and think they have faith when they are far from having it. It shall be made clear that only If they have faith can they truly repent and grieve over their sins. Without repentance theirs is an imagined faith. True faith brings comfort and joy in God, and we do not feel such comfort and joy where there is no repentance or fearfulness, as Christ says in Matt. 11 [:5]: “The poor have good news preached to them.”

These two are the first elements of Christian life: Repentance or contrition and grief, and faith through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and are righteous before God. Both should grow and increase in us.

-from Luther's Works; Volume 40; Church and Ministry II; Edited by Conrad Bergendoff; Muhlenberg Press; Philadelphia; 1958; "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors"; pp. 274 ff.

So Luther commands the preaching of the Law as a method of awakening those without compunction of conscience. Where and when would Reformed pastors today do the same? I grieve to think some would call it spiritual abuse.

I've long maintained there's nothing more dangerous for a pastor's tenure than for him to warn unbelievers who have been rendered "without compunction of conscience" by unfaithful shepherds who coddled them by neglecting God's Law and warnings and never led them to true fear of God and repentance. And I'm convinced that many, if not most, evangelicals (including, and maybe especially, those in Reformed churches) are in the precise situation Luther here describes: they have been given over to an error "worse than all those hitherto prevailing." In other words, an error worse than the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Reformation.

Though I try, I can't escape the conviction that this is the true state of the Protestant church, today. We have removed the fear of God and are left with congregations filled with souls enslaved to greed, adultery, imaged idolatry, rebellion, and gossip all the while remaining entirely without compunction of conscience and eating at the Lord's Table with impunity, never obstructed in their presumption by loving and faithful shepherds.

Yes, there's always a danger of too-tender consciences, and we must work to assure such godly souls of the certainty of God's call and work through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. But such souls are exceptional in our wicked day when to be American and to be Christian are one and the same.

Love,

Posted by: [Tim Bayly](http://www.baylyblog.com/) |