

**THE
BROKENHEARTED
EVANGELIST**

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JEREMY WALKER



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The Brokenhearted Evangelist

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PREFACE

Do you know and believe that there is nothing that glorifies God more than the accomplishment of His saving purposes in His Son, Jesus Christ? Do you know and believe that there is nothing more important to a person than the destiny of his immortal soul? Do you know and believe that there is a heaven to be gained and a hell from which to flee, and that our relationship to the Lord Jesus is the difference between the two? Do you know and believe that only those who repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved? Do you know and believe that God sends His saints into the world in order to preach that gospel by which sinners are saved?

It is easy to answer such questions with a gutless orthodoxy. Lively faith in Christ grasps spiritual realities in a way that galvanizes the believer. All truth—whether of God’s grace to us or of our duty to God—bears fruit in us only insofar as we are connected to Christ by faith. This being so, says John Owen, “he alone understands divine truth who doeth it: John vii.17. There is not, therefore, any one text of Scripture which presseth our duty unto God, that we can so understand as to perform that duty in an acceptable manner, without an actual regard unto Christ, from whom alone we receive ability for the performance of it, and in or through whom alone it is accepted with God.”¹

We cannot pretend that we have understood divine truth unless we are living it. We cannot pretend that we know and believe the truth

1. John Owen, *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 1:82.

about men, souls, heaven, hell, and salvation unless it is making a difference in the way we think, feel, pray, speak, and act.

A vigorous, practical concern for the lost, growing out of a desire for God's glory in man's salvation, is an eminently Christlike thing and a hallmark of healthy Christianity. By such a standard, there are many unhealthy churches and unhealthy Christians; by such a standard, and to my great grief, I am not well myself.

While I accept that there can be an unbalanced and crippling expectation and even unbiblical obsession with some aspects of evangelism and "mission" (as the portentous modern singular would have it), there is an opposite and perhaps greater danger in our day that believers and churches enjoying possession of a great deposit of truth nevertheless do not *know* it. If they did, they would be doing something.

It is very easy to be up in arms, for example, about current assaults on what can so calmly be described as the doctrine of hell. "Of course there is a hell!" we protest, offended and disturbed that someone could deny what is so plainly written in the Word of God. Is there a hell? What difference has it made? What have we done differently because there is a hell? Is its reality driving our thoughts, words, and deeds? Many of us who have entered the kingdom have come perilously close to the flames of the pit. We have felt its fire, and yet we have, perhaps, forgotten that from which we have been delivered. The urgency with which we fled to Christ ourselves has perhaps been replaced with a casual awareness of spiritual reality that never energizes us to do anything for those who are themselves in danger of eternal punishment.

The same could be said of heaven, of Christ's atonement for sinners, of God's grace and mercy, of the freeness of the gospel, of the excellence of salvation. "Yes...yes...yes," the monotonous ticking off of doctrines received continues. But what difference does it make to you and me?

It is my heartfelt contention that the truths we believe ought to make the people of God brokenhearted evangelists. My prayer for this book is that the Lord Christ would make its author and its readers truly understand the gospel duty that God has laid upon His church and therefore make us willing to perform the work we have been given to

do. By His strength may God make us able to do it, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

My thanks are due to Seth Getz, who strongly urged me to develop this material and encouraged me along the way; to the several friends who analyzed and assessed various portions and gave their feedback generously and robustly; to the believers, past and present, whom I have come to know remotely or immediately, who in their spirit and activity exemplify the truths I have labored to communicate; and to my wife, who patiently bears with and encourages a husband who fails more often than he succeeds to embrace all the aspects of the work he has been given to do.



*To those who go out in order to compel
the needy to come in.*

*May God grant success to such labors,
that His house may be full.*



CHAPTER 3

AM I COMMITTED?

Our Appointed Means

David is speaking as one who has repented of his sins, turning from them back to God. He has cried out to God that he might have a clean heart and a steadfast spirit within him. He has called upon God to keep him in close communion with Him, and he has asked that he might have restored to him the joy of God's salvation, which no man or woman can have who lives carelessly and unrepentantly in sin. He has prayed that he might be upheld by God's generous Spirit, in order that he might then go and sin no more.

On the basis of this, David then cries out to God with a pledge of obedient service, a desire that God would be glorified, not just in David's own redemption but in the salvation of many others. So he says in verse 13, "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You."

We have considered the undeniable obligation for every believer in Jesus Christ to be a brokenhearted evangelist after the model of David. We have looked over our necessary equipment, asking what must be the foundation of our labors in order that our evangelism be effective. For that we went back to verse 12: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit." We need the joy of God's salvation, a comfortable sense of what it means to have our own sins pardoned, and a consistent life of godliness, so that what we speak is borne out and powerfully confirmed by the way in which we live.

If you want to liken this to a machine, those two things are the source of power. This is where the heat is found to drive the steam engine. But it is not just heat that we need, not just motive force and ability and drive,

it is also light. It is not just a matter of battering people into submission by the avalanche of our joy in God's salvation and holiness of our lives. Rather, it is on the basis of those things and building upon that foundation that David says, "I will teach transgressors Your ways."

There is the question of undeniable obligation: Are we willing to undertake this work? There is the question of necessary equipment: How can we be effective in this work? But we must also consider the appointed means. What is it that I should do? How can I consecrate and structure my labors in order to win souls for Jesus Christ? How do I actually go about pursuing the salvation of sinners? We will direct our attention first to the people with whom we have to deal; second, to the mode of our dealing; and, third, to the substance of our dealing.

The People with Whom We Deal

David says, "I will teach *transgressors* Your ways." A transgressor is someone who crosses a line—somebody who has sinned against the Lord's holy law by crossing God's righteously established boundaries. It is such people that David undertakes to teach God's ways. We need to take the good news to those who need it. It is very easy, even as Christians, to "talk a good game" or pray a fervent prayer, even to preach a potent sermon or to express a real desire or intention that sinners would be saved. But unless we are actually engaging with ungodly men and women in or after those things, we are not doing the work of an evangelist. It is necessary, in order to see transgressors turning to God, that we actually communicate with those who are transgressing. We need to speak with those going on in grievous sins as well as those glossy hypocrites who may look fine, but are like those whom our Lord described as "whitewashed tombs"—apparently pure and holy on the outside, but inside entirely unclean, full of dead men's bones. It is necessary that we go into both situations, because transgressors come in every spiritual shape and size. They can be very uncomfortable to deal with. They can be morally filthy, physically repugnant, and in every way aggressive, or they can be very pleasant, "nice" people who just keep you at arm's length. You find transgressors of God's law working in the very highest

positions in the land, attaining to the highest levels of society, and you find them among the lowest of the low, crawling in the gutter.

In our Lord's day in Jerusalem, there were Pharisees: the top dogs, the religious elite, who were in their own eyes more holy than anybody else. What were they before God? They were transgressors. And then there were the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the thieves and robbers, the scandalously immoral. They also were transgressors. Jesus spent time and spoke with them both. Those who thought themselves to be something were disgusted that Christ should even deign to be with those who were "sinners," actually to associate with them, having fellowship with the transparently godless. And yet whether they are openly or secretly godless, whether it lies evident to the eyes of others or not, transgressors are those with whom we must engage in order to teach them God's ways. That does not necessarily mean that we all need to go into crack houses or brothels, spend all our time in the worst areas of our neighborhoods, knock on the doors of the most violent and cruel of our neighbors, minister outside the straight and gay bars and clubs and strip joints...but someone needs to. Are these lost people not transgressors in need of God's salvation? Can we bear to restrict our labors to those with whom we are more comfortable because they accord more with our ideas of what Christians ought to be, at least potentially? What did Paul say to the church in Corinth concerning their past? "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

That some of these Corinthian Christians had been such men and women means that before they were saved someone was willing to go and speak to them as such. Paul was there preaching to those who needed to hear the truth as it is in Christ: he stood before kings, emperors, judges, and rulers...but he also stood before the street workers and the gang members of his day. He did not consider it beyond him to go

either to the very heights or to the very depths of society as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Whether or not they are palatable to us, if people are sinners, if they have sinned against God, they need the gospel: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to *every creature*” (Mark 16:15, emphasis added). It is not for us to draw the lines about who needs the gospel, or even whom we should like to see in the church. Rich and poor, male and female, whatever their background or previous creed, every kingdom, tribe, tongue, and nation—if they are transgressors, then they need the gospel.

It is therefore necessary that at least some of us start with but go beyond our own neat and pleasant zones of ease and comfort. That is going to be hard for us, because most of us are set in our ways, and it is not easy to deal with people of whose lives and ways we feel utterly ignorant or who may be very distasteful to us or who move and work and speak in a sphere very distant from our own. We may be unable to rise to the heights of some, we may be unwilling in ourselves to sink to the depths of others, but if we are to see sinners saved then we must go after transgressors. In Matthew 5, our Lord says,

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (vv. 13–16).

Is your church a light to the world? Are you the salt of the earth? Is your light shining before men—all men—from the top to the bottom of society? This is not a picture of a church divorced from the world, but of a church divorced from worldliness and engaged with a fallen world for the glory of Christ.

It is no good if the light just shines inward. If you put a lamp up with the shutters down, then the light and heat are merely contained. You need to introduce the light to the darkness in order for the light to be effective. That is what we must be as churches and members of

them: we need to engage with lawbreakers who have besmirched God's image in themselves and who have sinned in any of a multitude of ways, whether they are despicable even in the eyes of a fallen world, common unconverted folk, or glossy performers of outward righteousness with all the appearance of morality. They are transgressors. We need to go to them and deal with them as transgressors. Our light—the light of the gospel that we have in Christ—needs to shine into the darkness of this world, and we must carry it there.

John the Baptist was a “burning and shining lamp” (John 5:35), and so must we be. The light is relatively unprofitable when unveiled in a bright place, but it shows itself wholly effective when introduced into the darkness. This world is a dark place, and we must bring the light of the gospel to bear upon those in the darkness, from those in the foul murk of socially acceptable godlessness to those in the dark corners of scandalous iniquity.

Where will you begin? Some may need to begin with their own family, with children, siblings, or parents never yet addressed. Perhaps it will begin with a pleasant neighbor. You might be chatting over the fence or bump into each other on the street. You might have some small service to perform or an offer of help, and you try to find an opportunity to speak a few words concerning the Lord Jesus, commending Christ and the hope you have found in Him. Or there may be someone across the road or down the street that you have not spoken to before, despite countless cheerful waves when you are both out at the same time. Someone might need help caring for his property during one or all of the year's seasons, and you might volunteer. Perhaps you could invite neighbors over for a meal, and the atmosphere in which you give thanks for the food and the conversation over the table and perhaps a brief, warm time of family worship all press home the claims of Jesus. Maybe there is some awkward, difficult, grumpy neighbor, the scourge of the street, gossiped about and sneered at by everyone else. Is this an opportunity to show that Christ's people are different and perhaps open a gospel door? There may be a group of kids who play outside. Perhaps some older teenagers are hanging around. Maybe they congregate in a park. Could you go and chat with them publicly rather than

crossing the street or taking a detour to avoid them? Maybe there is a nearby school, and some of the students hang out afterwards because they have nowhere else to go. Will you speak with them?

When we begin to think in terms of going and saying rather than waiting and staying, the possibilities become limitless. Remind yourself that Christ has promised to be with you until the end of the age and then go, and, as you go, make disciples. You cannot go outside of Jesus' jurisdiction, and no situation carries you beyond His sphere of operations. He has promised that by His Spirit He will be with you always, even to the end of the age. You need that assurance, because you may be rebuffed, even repeatedly. Nice, moralistic, middle-class neighbors will throw up their smokescreens, evade the issues, or politely divert the conversation on to other topics. Some people may make fun of you. Some may ask questions without caring much for the answers. Others will become angry, and some will boast of their sinfulness. Some will lose interest after a few minutes, others after a few months. But sow the good seed, and pray God to prepare the ground of people's hearts. And then keep sowing. It is so easy to give up. Sometimes we find ourselves put off by what we deem to be a negative reaction, forgetting that when the gospel comes, it often does bite unbelievers' consciences, and they kick—sometimes hard—against the goads before finally they submit to the righteousness of God. That anger, bitterness, aggression, or some other spiritual venom may be an initial response to the truth pressed home by the Spirit of God in someone's heart. Therefore, press on. Remember that hearts composed of the rubber of self-righteousness often see the gospel hammer simply bounce off, but those hearts of brittle sin and surface antagonism may be the ones that will shatter when that hammer falls. Indeed, this is the best way to breed broken-hearted evangelists!

To be an unforgiven transgressor is to be a most fearful thing. Such men and women have sinned against the holy God. If they have not turned to Jesus Christ, then they need the good news that Christ died for lawbreakers. Our purpose as Christians is to make the light of Christ shine before the world, to speak of the Christ who has saved our souls from our sins, who has redeemed us from sin and death and hell:

we proclaim the praises of the gracious God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light, as those who once had no relationship with God but are now His people, who had lacked mercy but have now obtained it in Christ (1 Peter 2:9). We do not call men and women lawbreakers so we will be able to look down on them and say, “Ha! We are so much better than you are!” Remember how David approaches them; remember how we are to deal with one another. We come as those who are ourselves sinners. We cannot put ourselves on a pedestal and say, “If only you were like me, you would not need Jesus Christ.” Rather, we say, “Because you are like me and I am like you, you also need Jesus Christ.” We plead with the unsaved to hear what we say concerning Jesus Christ, that they would take heed and pay attention, that they would consider what we say concerning the One who has ransomed us. This is why we are here as Christians. This is the thing we pursue night and day: the glory of Christ through the salvation of those otherwise on their way to hell. It is our passionate desire.

We want to be better equipped to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, pleading with and exhorting and teaching sinners that Christ is able to save them in order that they might no longer be subject to the wrath and condemnation of a holy God, but might be washed through the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and so brought into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love and made heirs of all the glories of heaven. It is with these men, these women, these boys and girls, that we must deal—transgressors! We must not allow ourselves to be blinded to the reality of lawbreaking either by how pleasant or acceptable they appear or allow ourselves to be scared off by how filthy and depraved they might become.

The Mode of Our Dealing

How do we address those whom we long to see saved? David says, “I will *teach* transgressors *Your ways*.” We are to teach them, and we are to teach them God’s ways. Our normal problems in the face of this exemplary declaration are either that we cannot or will not. What is it to teach transgressors God’s ways? It is to communicate truth concerning God; it is at the very least to impart information. Teaching concerns

the giving of instruction. This is preeminently true of the preaching of God's Word. That is why the preaching of God's Word must be the central element of the witness of any local church, because our Bibles say that it is through preaching that men and women are saved.

Think again of just a few texts from the New Testament that speak of how important it is that people hear the Word of God and are taught what it means to follow after Christ. At the end of Matthew's gospel, our Lord gives the commission to His disciples, and through them to the church:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20).

In the letter to the Romans, Paul asks, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15). In 1 Corinthians 2, the apostle declared that when he came among them, he had "determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (v. 2). He was there to teach them about the Savior of sinners. In Galatians 3:2, he talks of the Galatians, who have been bewitched away, as it were, from obeying the truth, people before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. "This only I want to learn from you," asks Paul. "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Finally, in 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul further instructs Timothy that the things the young pastor has heard from Paul among many witnesses should be committed "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

What is the appointed means of taking the gospel to unconverted men and women? It is teaching. This is true preeminently of preaching, but it must also be true in all our witness to Christ. We are to be teachers of transgressors, not setting ourselves up as if we know it all, but

teaching as humble, personal evangelists. The mode of action to which we must cling is teaching the truth as it is in Jesus.

You notice that David is very plain: "I will teach transgressors Your ways." I hope that we are ready to applaud such a declaration, especially if we account ourselves Christians who hold fast to the Word of God. David does not say, "Perform to transgressors; put on a drama for them." He does not say, "Water down or dumb down the truth," or "Whip up a storm of excitement and emotionalism, as if to drive people into the kingdom of God on a wave of passion without engaging their minds." When such obvious shortcomings are identified, we can easily pat ourselves on the back. Perhaps we do not employ gimmicks, nor do we try to do things that are not ordained by the Word of God. A gospel choir visiting the UK won the following plaudit from the press: "You don't have to be a believer to be inspired." What is the problem? You might be lifted up, your heart might swell within you, you hear those thumping and insistent rhythms, those soaring voices, and it is all so beautiful. But what is actually being carried along inside that? Is there any truth being clearly conveyed? If this was real gospel communication, then unbelievers may well not be "inspired." When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, men were cut to the heart (Acts 2:37). When Stephen preached before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, the Word of God came in convicting power to the point at which sinners gnashed their teeth and stoned him to death, but some of those fiery words perhaps stuck in the heart of Saul of Tarsus and might have been among the goads against which he was kicking when he was finally brought to bow before the enthroned Jesus. When Paul himself preached in Athens, some showed utter contempt, some showed insipid curiosity, and some were truly converted (Acts 17:32–34).

So much of what passes for evangelism in our day is simply froth, aimed not through the mind to the heart and will, but simply at whipping up or playing on carnal emotions. But when we discuss teaching transgressors God's ways, we are not talking about outward displays designed to sweep people without any thought into what some imagine to be the kingdom of God. We are not talking about trying to stir up mere human passions.

And perhaps so far many of us are in agreement, perhaps ready to pat ourselves on the back and say, “Yes, we are good Christians, we believe all those things, and over my dead body would such crass manipulations come into the church to which I belong.” But there is a problem, because David says, positively and definitely, “I will teach transgressors Your ways.” And for some of us, our problems perhaps do not lie so much in the things that we would do but in the things that we are *not* doing as individuals and churches. Accepting that we are not “arguing for unreflecting activism, for carelessness and superficiality,” Ted Donnelly asks, “Are we in a position to criticize those who are doing imperfectly what we may not be doing at all?”¹ Jim Savastio puts it like this:

So the other day there was this kid drowning at the local pool. While several could have responded to the flailing, the only one to dive in was this fat, balding man in ill-fitting trunks. The man did a pitiful belly flop into the pool and then dog paddled over [to] the child and somehow managed to pull him to safety. The fat, balding, winded man was nothing in comparison to the many that *could* have saved the child. There was a handsome guard with his nose buried in a book entitled, “Great Rescues through the Ages—the proper manner and techniques to prevent drowning.” There were two men on the side arguing about how to best adapt to the water and especially on whether or not to become more like the drowning child in order to reach him. I could go on, but you get the point. When I transitioned from being in the broadly evangelical camp into the solidly reformed camp, I heard and I repeated many criticisms about all the things that are wrong with evangelism today. Many, if not all, those criticisms are valid. There are often things that are lacking in presentation (but even in these cases, God is using these efforts to genuinely save people). Nevertheless, just as the fat man in our parable, there are those who are getting the job done, who are out and about with a zeal for souls, while too many others stand on the sidelines. The

1. Edward Donnelly, *Heaven and Hell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 58.

question of Jesus that ought to ring in our hearts when we level our scoffing at the “belly flopping” and the “dog paddling” is this, *What do you do more than others?*²

This is neither the time for smugness and criticism from the lean lifeguards as they stand on the side sneering at the dog-paddling—the awkward but effective splashing—of those who do not know how to swim like us, nor the moment to complain about the state of the pool, still less to criticize harshly those who are drowning for getting themselves into trouble in the first place. Now is the time to jump into the filthy water and do all in our power to bring drowning people to safety.

When David says, “I will teach transgressors Your ways,” he is not saying, “I will debate with sinners and simply give them my opinion—and take theirs—until at the end we agree to disagree.” He is not saying, “Just be around sinners, simply hang around as if they will absorb the gospel without our saying a single word.” David does not say, “Be nice to transgressors—they’ll figure out that you’re a Christian and what it means to be saved.” David does not say, “Give your side of the story and allow them to give theirs,” or “Undertake some kind of ‘hit-and-run gospeling.’” We probably all know some curious and distressing examples of this. I recall a situation in which a deeply distressed man visited the church I serve. He had recently lost his wife to death through a terrible illness and had come to church to see if there were answers to his questions and comforts for his soul. One man took a copy of a well-known evangelistic booklet and simply thrust it with little comment into his hand. With barely a further word, the Christian walked away. I am not saying that God could not have used the truth of that booklet to do the soul of that man some good, but he was wrestling with certain issues about his wife’s condition before God, and he knew that she was a sinner, and that tract was not given with Christian affection or supported with Christian explanation when an opportunity was given for

2. James Savastio, “A Parable in a Pool,” *Reformed Baptist Fellowship* (blog), October 24, 2008, <http://reformedbaptistfellowship.wordpress.com/2008/10/24/a-parable-in-a-pool>.

both. The cold presentation of those truths, it seemed, drove the visitor away. Too often we hope that some tract will do all our talking for us.

More strangely, we hear of visitors to someone's home leaving a tract in the family bathroom in the hope that when members of the family went in they would be obliged to read something, and they might take up the tract. Others leave a tract in someone's refrigerator in the hope that it would be visited soon. We cannot say that it is guaranteed to be a worthless gesture, but it is not properly evangelism. It may be well-meaning, earnest, and sincere, but it is not really teaching transgressors God's ways. We must seek to engage with others person to person. This seems to be where so many of us are falling short as Christians. Too often either we cannot or will not engage with transgressors so as to teach them God's ways. No one becomes a Christian by osmosis, by silent and unwitting absorption of the truth. No one sucks up Christianity just from being around us and suddenly becomes a Christian without being informed of the truth as it is in Jesus. Carrying around a Bible to show yourself a Christian might eventually spark an interest in someone. However, opening it, speaking it, and living it is evangelism, whereas simply having a Bible—however prominently displayed—cannot (in most instances) be more than a preliminary maneuver intended to open the door to closer dealing with a needy sinner.

The mode of our dealing is teaching: we are to be giving instruction. We must therefore engage in clear, reasoned, earnest, persuasive declaration of God's truth to those yet dead in trespasses and sins, and we must do so both by *pattern* and by *precept*.

A Pattern That Teaches Transgressors God's Ways

Everything we do must manifest and bear out the truth we speak. There simply is no room in this world for a gospel of "Do as I say, not as I do." Our sinful lives, our angry words, our aggressive behavior, our rudeness, our insensitivity, our pride—those things can undo or overwhelm our message of peace with God through the death of Jesus Christ. How do you think people feel when they look at you if you have said to them, "Believe in Christ and be saved; when you trust in Jesus you become a new man or woman, you have new motives and new desires,

your behavior changes”? Will they look at you or me and say, “In what way? What’s changed?” They will be quick to pick up on our flaws. We might say, “That’s not fair, because there are good bits too!” But it is the flaws they will look at, and our reactions to them. And so, in our lives, we must both pursue a consistent pattern of godliness and manifest a genuine gospel response to our own sins. If we profess the truth without practicing the truth, we rob ourselves of all power in teaching transgressors God’s ways:

Christian love is by no means so plentiful as it might be, nor holy living, either. Is not this the thing that weakens the preaching of the gospel—the want of living the gospel? If all the professed Christians who live in London really walked as Christ walked, would not the salt have more effect upon the corrupt mass than the stuff which is now called salt seems to have? We preach here in the pulpit; but what can we do, unless you preach yonder at home? It is you preaching in your shops, in your kitchens, in your nurseries, in your parlours, in the streets, which will tell on the masses. This is the preaching—the best preaching in the world, for it is seen as well as heard. I heard one say he liked to see men preach with their feet; and this is it, “they ought also so to walk even as Christ walked.” No testimony excels that which is borne in ordinary life. Christ ought to be glorified by us, and therefore we ought to be like him, for if we are not, we cannot glorify him, but must dishonor him.³

The Precepts That Teach Transgressors God’s Ways

Upon the foundation of a holy life we are to declare the truth as it is in Jesus. We must be careful in our worship, which is not first for the sake of men. Our worship is for God. It is Him we come to worship; it is Him to whom we give praise and honor and glory. He is the focus, and we come before Him to have dealings with Him, to hear Him, and to respond to Him in praise and prayer, with repentance and faith. To accomplish that we need Him to speak to us, and this He does through the reading

3. C. H. Spurgeon, “In Him: Like Him,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971), 29:413–14.

and preaching of His Word. So as we engage in the worship of God, all that we do—by the way we do it, by what we say and sing, by how we pray, by what we read, by the manner and substance of our preaching, by our conversations before and after the service—these things must be teaching transgressors God’s ways. If there are sinners in our midst who have not yet been saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, those people should not be able to deny that they are learning something about God by being among us (compare 1 Cor. 14:25). They are learning something by what we say and the way in which we say it, by the manner in which we worship God. All of our dealings with God ought to be instructive to one another and to others coming in about who God is, what He is, and the way He is. To be among the people of God as they engage in true worship can and should be a converting experience.

But, primarily, this relates to the clear verbal communication of vital truth. We come to know God by hearing about Him: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Such communication should be as direct, thoughtful, careful, and balanced as possible. When we speak to someone who has been utterly ignorant of who God is and the way God deals with sinful men, he should no longer be able to say, “I am still clueless.” The truth may not yet have penetrated to the soul, and in that sense he may be still in darkness, but he has heard the truth. Such a person should be to some degree instructed in God’s ways. As humble disciples of the Lord Jesus, who are ourselves scholars in Christ’s school, we need to teach transgressors God’s ways.

There are multitudes of ways in which we can legitimately do this, many spheres in which we can teach God’s truth. We do not need a classroom with a pliant group of unconverted people. The obvious way, already mentioned, is preaching, where men gifted and appointed by Christ and recognized by His church as gospel preachers declare the truth to all who come within reach of their voice and go out to ensure that as many come to hear the truth as possible. We can do it indirectly by inviting friends and neighbors to come and hear the preaching. But it does not need to come from the pulpit alone. We do it when we teach in Sunday school. We do it in our family worship as we open our Bibles

to tell our families about the great things that God has done. We do it as we explain the world and its ways to our children or kneel by their bedside to pray at night. We do it in Bible studies or perhaps prayer meetings. We do it over the water cooler or the photocopier, not stealing hours of our employers' time and making them *de facto* supporters of a vocational evangelist, but by natural, easy, occasional testimonies to the fact that Christ is our all in all. We do it in our everyday conversation, over a coffee, at the checkout, spending time with friends. We can do it even in some of the words, phrases, and patterns of speech that we have, as we indicate that certain things are true about God and His ways of dealing with us. We can do it by commenting on what is taking place in the world or musing over a book we have read or a film that we have seen or heard about. We do it over lunch and dinner. We go out with a group of friends and we are not ashamed to speak a word for Jesus while there. If there is some great disaster or great deliverance, we can bring the Word of God to bear upon that situation, so that in the course of that comment or conversation, God's ways are revealed and instruction is given. We write letters or e-mails, cards, and notes to send our thanks or wish good health. We can give gifts of books, we can hand out tracts, we can send CDs to friends, post notes on social media, or mail MP3s or videos or sermon recommendations. You can probably think of a hundred other legitimate means by which gospel truth can be communicated, but—whatever means we find available and appropriate—what we must pack into those things must be the conscious, deliberate desire to instruct sinners in the ways of God. That should not require some great, formal change of gear in our attitudes and actions, as if we mentally put on our Sunday best in order to make some portentous declamation of truth from on high. We are Christians who know the joy of God's salvation, and to speak of Jesus ought to be the spontaneous overflow of a heart full of love for God and for people.

The Substance of Our Dealing

The substance of all our teaching is to be God's ways. To this end we must devote and consecrate all of our God-given powers and abilities of communication.

What does it mean to teach men and women God's ways? It means to declare to them the God that we have come to know as sovereign and holy, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression—a God who is good and does good.

We must speak to them of God's justice regarding sin and His mercy for sinners. We must talk of the righteousness, holiness, and might of God. We must speak of the anger of God against sin, and the grace of God with sinners. We must talk of how God has made peace for men with Himself by means of a sacrifice. We must talk of God's electing love and His sovereign power. We should speak of His mercies, talk of His lovingkindness, and profess all His glorious character. We must reveal to people, and press home upon their consciences, the power and wisdom of God displayed in the death of Jesus Christ. We must show them from our Bibles how Christ is the highest and purest revelation of God, how in Him we see all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We must show them how forgiveness of sins is obtained through repentance from those sins and faith in Jesus Christ. We must show them Christ's sacrifice in the place of His people. We must teach them of a Christ who rose again from the dead on the third day, a Christ who ascended to God's right hand in heaven, a Christ who intercedes for His church, obtaining a blessing from God for His people in accordance with His mercy, a Christ who is still at work saving sinners from sin, death, and hell. We must tell of a Christ who has sent His Spirit into the church to enliven and enlighten, the Spirit who regenerates, opens blind eyes, and indwells the believer so that these things of the joy of God's salvation and a consistent life are made true of those who trust in Jesus Christ. We must speak to them of life from death, heaven and hell, God's grace and glory, and the life of righteousness, peace, love, and obedience for those who put their trust in Christ. We must show them what it means to be translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

In short, we must speak all that God has spoken to us in all the fullness of its gospel glory, and we must speak it with clarity, biblical balance, integrity, earnestness, and humility, carried along with fervent

desire and ardent prayer for the salvation of those to whom we are speaking. We must become teachers of God's ways.

If all that seems overwhelming, then note that David makes a start in only nineteen verses. Is that not what he is doing here in Psalm 51? Granted, David's words here do not cover every detail of the gospel. Nevertheless, it is a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, record of what it looks like for a man to turn from his sins and find forgiveness with God. Spurgeon put the matter simply: "The more of God we proclaim, the more likely is it that sinners will be converted unto God."⁴ The more we speak of God—in all the fullness of the revelation that He has given—the more likely it is that we shall see sinners saved. Candlish drives it home:

It is not your own righteousness that you have to commend to transgressors, but the righteousness of God. It is that very righteousness of God through faith in which you yourself are delivered from blood-guiltiness, and God becomes to you the God of your salvation. Your complete justification in the sight of God,—the perfect righteousness in virtue of which you are justified,—with no concession of his supreme authority, his sovereignty and law, but, on the contrary, with the fullest vindication of all his just and holy claims,—places you on a high ground of advantage.... But plant your foot on the righteousness of God, the God of your salvation; the saving righteousness which he himself has provided, in the person and work of his own beloved Son. Take your firm ground as being righteously accepted in the beloved. Then lay all hesitancy and false shame aside.... Through grace you are emboldened to appear erect and fearless before God. The same grace will make you bold in the presence of men. Then fear not. Shun not to declare to all men the whole counsel of God.⁵

It is God in all His ways, God revealed purely and preeminently in Christ for the exaltation and vindication of His glory in the salvation of sinners, that is our great and glorious theme. While we could turn all this a thousand ways, let us take to heart just three simple things.

4. Spurgeon, "Christian's Great Business," 498.

5. Candlish, *Prayer of a Broken Heart*, 76–77.

Engagement with Those around Us

Are you engaging with the men and women and boys and girls around you who need the gospel of God? Are you and I getting to grips with the lawbreakers around us who, without gospel light, will be condemned for all eternity? Are we speaking with our friends and families—parents, siblings, husbands and wives, sons and daughters? Are we speaking the truth in love to our colleagues and neighbors, even strangers with whom we might have occasional contact? Are we developing the relationships that will enable us to communicate God's ways to needy sinners? We are not motivated by an underhand desire whereby we lose sight of a real person with whom we are dealing, ready to cut another notch in our soul-winners' belts as another dehumanized target falls before the force of our holy logic. Rather, when we are engaging with other men and women, whatever our present relationship with them, one of the things we desire and at which we aim is that we might be the means of their learning by instruction and experience God's ways and thereby being converted from their sins.

Commitment to Teaching the Truth

Are you committed, in principle and practice, to teaching the good news as God's primary appointed means for effective evangelism? Are you learning by experience, developing your abilities and honing your skills, taking whatever opportunities come your way to become more proficient in the life business of the Christian? Are you actually *doing* it? Are you speaking with transgressors, step by painful step, over the long haul? We cannot do it all at once. Sinners can be converted in an instant through teaching or after five minutes of gospel instruction. Such is the almighty power of God working by His truth. But it is also by long-term, repeated instruction, so that the weight of truth is built up until the Spirit of God makes it evident that Christ alone can save. Are we engaging, not just in the short term but in the long term and for the long haul, with all our faculties and capabilities, to bring the light of the gospel to those who are in darkness? Is this work borne along by prayers that the Spirit of God would so illuminate the minds and soften

the hearts of those to whom we speak that they might receive the truth and be saved?

It must be the truth that we teach. It must be the gospel that we communicate. We must seek to be skillful in the word of righteousness, that we may not pour out poison while imagining that we are administering soul medicine. Again, this is not a matter of extraordinary gift or talent, but a true and simple grasp on gospel truth. We cannot point to false refuges, waste time on empty explorations, or offer false consolations. We cannot preach man's experience or obedience, but rather God's grace in Christ. It is not the things that we should like to be true or hope may be true or wish were true, but the things that *are* true. The great thing is to point sinners to the Savior. When William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward, the three missionaries at Serampore, drew up a binding agreement with each other in 1805, this was one of their primary concerns:

In preaching to the heathen, we must keep to the example of St. Paul, and make the greatest subject of our preaching, Christ Crucified. It would be very easy for a missionary to preach nothing but truths, and that for many years together, without any well-grounded hope of becoming useful to one soul. The doctrine of Christ's expiatory death and all-sufficient merits had been, and must ever remain, the great means of conversion. This doctrine, and others immediately connected with it, have constantly nourished and sanctified the church. Oh, that these glorious truths ever be the joy and strength of our own souls, and then they will not fail to become the matter of our conversation to others. It was the proclaiming of these doctrines that made the Reformation from Popery in the time of Luther spread with such rapidity. It was these truths that filled the sermons of the modern Apostles, Whitefield, Wesley, etc., when the Light of the Gospel which has been held up with such glorious effects by the Puritans was almost extinguished in England. It is a well-known fact that the most successful missionaries in the world at the present day make the atonement of Christ their continued theme. We mean the Moravians. They attribute all their success to the preaching of the death of our Saviour. So far as our experience goes in this work,

we must freely acknowledge, that every Hindoo among us who has been gained to Christ, has been won by the astonishing and all-constraining love exhibited in our Redeemer's propitiatory death. O then may we resolve to know nothing among Hindoos and Mussulmans but Christ and Him crucified.⁶

Personal Knowledge of God's Ways

Are you personally proficient in God's ways? Have you yourself truly known what it is to be saved from your sins by such a gracious Redeemer? If you do not, then you really have nothing to say. Here is the root of all: I, as a sinner, have been saved by Jesus Christ. Although I may know little else of God's ways, I know what it is to be a sinner saved by grace. If I can do no more than list the realities of my experience, then I will list them and drop them into every ear in order to make people hear. And—if the root of the matter is in you and you are rejoicing in the joy of it and are advancing in the righteousness of God, developing in consistent holiness—are you possessed, presently and increasingly, of a warm, insightful, careful, balanced, growing knowledge of God in Christ? Are you increasingly in a position to teach transgressors the ways of the Lord God? Do you have a practical knowledge—not a mere head knowledge or just a memory for reciting, but a knowledge in your heart, soul, bones, and life—of what it is to trust in Christ and walk with God and to discern more and more of His glorious ways and works?

Writing to his brothers, Peter said, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18). Is it true of you that you are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ? May it prove true, to His eternal glory.

6. As cited in *William Carey: Especially His Missionary Principles*, by A. H. Oussoren (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1945), 276–77.