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Preaching Christ in the doctrines

It was the last night of the evangelistic meetings. The evening program had just concluded. I was on my way out the door when a church member who had attended the meetings regularly stopped me in the foyer. Her words startled me.

“I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciated these past few weeks,” she said. “I want to thank you for bringing out Christ in every message. These were the most Christ-centered meetings I’ve ever attended. If I had known they would be like this, I would have invited my friends.”

On one hand, I was thankful for her words of appreciation; on the other, I was disturbed that she had not invited her friends. I was compelled to ask her why.

She replied, “In the past, I brought my friends to evangelistic meetings, and I was mortified. Things were presented in a negative, condescending manner. Those who didn’t know these truths were made to feel as though they were ignorant or insincere. The speaker’s tone of voice was almost insulting. I didn’t hear much about Jesus. As my friends listened, I wanted to sink into the pew because I was embarrassed. Since then, I have not felt safe inviting friends to evangelistic meetings.”

Those words were seared into my consciousness. They reminded me of another lady’s words: “Lift up Jesus,

you that teach the people, lift Him up in sermon, in song, in prayer. Let all your powers be directed to pointing souls, confused, bewildered, lost, to the ‘Lamb of God.’ . . . Let the science of salvation be the burden of every sermon, the theme of every song.”¹ From then on, I determined to do exactly that.

How do we conduct Christ-centered evangelistic meetings? How do we preach Christ in every doctrine? How can we preach “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6) in a relational way that points people to a sin-pardoning Savior?

The first thing we have to do is ask ourselves three essential questions: (1) How does this doctrine point me to Jesus? (2) What does this doctrine tell me about Jesus’ love and character? (3) How does this doctrine point me to the Cross? After we have meditated on these questions, then we are ready to preach.

In this article, I will share some ways we can present biblical doctrines in a Christ-centered, positive, and relational manner.

Prophetic signs of the last days

The purpose of the signs of the last days should be to point people to Jesus and move them into a relationship with Him. Jesus uses the end-time signs as a bridge to get our attention and help us turn our eyes upon eternal things. He

allows us to see the hopeless condition of the world, so that we will realize our only hope for the future is in Him.

When talking about the signs, use 2 Timothy 3:1–5. Verse 5 explains that one of the signs is that there will be a “form of godliness” in the world, but it will have no power. Use this text as an opportunity to talk about how it is not enough to be religious on the outside, and that religious exercises in and of themselves will not satisfy our hearts. Explain that true religion means having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Then tell them what steps to take to have a relationship with Christ. Contrast the difference between religion on the inside and religion on the outside. Stress the importance of spending time with Jesus through a daily devotional life.

Do not just give them facts and figures. Give them the One whom the facts and figures point to—Jesus. Then tell them how to know Him, personally.

The Second Coming

Introduce people to the literal return of Jesus. Unfortunately, the focus sometimes ends up being an attack on the secret rapture. The heart of this message should not be a battle between two theologies—literal return versus secret return. The heart of this message should be about preparing people to meet Jesus. Talk to the congregation about whether they are ready

to meet Him. Ask whether they have the assurance of salvation. Then explain *how* they can have that assurance. If they do not have that assurance, it does not matter how Jesus will come because they will not be ready for Him.

Of course, it is important to understand the truth of His literal, visible, audible, and glorious coming (1 Thess. 4:15–17). There are many false doctrines that will lead people astray. If your only intention is to destroy the secret rapture doctrine, you will reach the head but not the heart. The primary focus should be on leading people to look at the return of Jesus with peace and assurance in their hearts. After all,

I know there are various views regarding the interpretation of the last week of this prophecy. Some want to move that final week into the future and create a seven-year tribulation with the antichrist coming in the middle, confirming a covenant, and eliminating the sacrificial system. Do not spend all your time combating alternative doctrine. Spend more time showing how the last week of this prophecy uplifts Christ and the Cross.

The 2,300 days

The 2,300-day prophecy (Dan. 8:13–16) is another Christ-centered prophecy, set in the context of the bibli-

Do not get caught up in trying to “prove” dates. By all means, expound on the dates involved in the prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9, while remembering that the whole point of this prophecy was not to prove a date but, rather, to draw people to an interceding Savior. You might conclude with Revelation 3:20, where Jesus knocks on the door and invites us to open our hearts to Him.

God's law

I used to spend all my time on proving that God's law was still binding. If I could prove that, I figured I had done my job. But where does Christ come in

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whether you believe Jesus is coming literally or secretly is irrelevant if you do not have a personal relationship with Him.

The 70 weeks

The 70-week prophecy (Dan. 9:24–27) is probably one of the most Christ-centered prophecies in the Bible. Its whole focus is on Jesus. Do not miss the opportunity to show how this entire prophecy uplifts Jesus and points us to Him as the Messiah who came to save us.

In Daniel 7:25, when it talks about how God gave Israel 490 years to return to Him, use this as an opportunity to talk about Christ's everlasting love and patience with us. Tell a story of how the Holy Spirit patiently pursues lost people. Share some of your own testimony of how God would not let you go.

cal sanctuary. Take time to explain the sanctuary services of the Old Testament and emphasize how the Lamb who was slain represents Jesus. Show them how to recognize what Jesus has done for them through these sacrificial offerings.

When you mention the Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the sanctuary, remind them that Jesus is eager to cleanse their lives and present them faultless before the throne. Share a story of someone's conversion and how Christ was able to cleanse them from sin. Explain how Christ's perfect and righteous life covers us and that we have salvation benefits both now and in the judgment.

Describe how Christ serves as our High Priest, constantly working in our behalf. Then spend some time sharing the principles of how to talk to Jesus, personally, and how to have a meaningful prayer life.

as the central focus? If all we do is prove the law is still binding, we are giving people only half the message.

We must point out how the law illuminates our failures and shortcomings for the purpose of pointing us to Christ and revealing our need for Him (Gal. 3:24). The law shows that “I need Jesus as my Substitute.” Explain substitution and how Jesus' righteous life is credited to us by faith alone, the heart of the gospel message.

This is an old illustration, but I love it. Rub dirt on your face, and then take a mirror and try to cleanse yourself by rubbing the mirror on your face. Your audience sees that this does not make you clean but, rather, makes things worse. The mirror can only reveal your need for water (Jesus). Then wash your face with water in their presence.

The mirror told you to go to the water. God's law tells you to go to Jesus

(cf. Jam. 1:18, 23-25). It gets the point across in a powerful way. Then use Matthew 11:28 to appeal to people to come to Jesus and be cleansed.

Sabbath

I used to be satisfied in establishing that Saturday is the Sabbath, but this is only “head knowledge.” I realized I was not doing justice to the subject and was missing a wonderful opportunity to uplift Jesus. I came to realize that the Sabbath is all about having a relationship with Christ (Mark 2:27, 28).

Explain that we cease from our labors so that we can spend personal time with Him in a way that we cannot the other six days. Go to Genesis 2:1-3, and emphasize that Jesus loves us so much that, from the beginning, He created a day on which to rest from His work in order to spend time with us. God created the Sabbath because He finds it so important to have a personal relationship with each of us! Illustrate how the Sabbath shows He has become a personal God to you.

Tell a story of two people falling in love and enjoying each other’s company. Show how this maintains the purpose of the Sabbath. We set aside our daily work agenda so that we can grow in an intimate relationship with Jesus and fall in love with Him.

Further explain that this is the reason why the devil hates God’s Sabbath. He despises anything that leads to us spending time with Jesus. This is why he has worked so hard to destroy the Sabbath. He hates the opportunity it affords us to spend time with Christ.

It might also be helpful to mention Colossians 1:15, 16, which identifies Christ as the Creator. Since the Sabbath was created as a memorial of Creation, the Sabbath uplifts Jesus as the Creator. In addition, Hebrews 4:4-10 uses the physical rest of the Sabbath to symbolize our spiritual rest in Jesus. In other words, we can stop worrying about not being good enough and rest our faith in Jesus. Salvation is based on His works, not on ours.

This means the Sabbath uplifts Jesus as the Redeemer. Therefore, if the

Sabbath uplifts Christ as Creator and Redeemer, this makes the Sabbath the most Christ-centered, grace-oriented teaching in the entire New Testament. Now that is worth sharing! So, do not just prove that the seventh day is the Sabbath; emphasize the relational aspect of the Sabbath and how it deepens our relationship with Christ.

State of the dead

Remember, the focus of the message would not be simply to prove that people do not go to heaven right after they die. That, too, is only head knowledge. Yes, you want that truth to be clear, but it is not the primary focus. The primary focus is that through Jesus there is hope of life after death. Emphasize Revelation 1:18, where Jesus says, “I have the keys of death.” He is the key to overcoming death and having eternal life. Repeat this throughout your message. It is filled with assurance.

Talk about the fact that when we sleep in the grave, Jesus shields us from all the pain and suffering of this world. Describe the resurrection, when Jesus calls people from the grave to be reunited with their families in a scene of inexpressible joy. Families will enter the kingdom of heaven and share eternity together forever (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

Tell a story of someone you look forward to seeing again. Ask the audience whether there is someone they want to be reunited with. Then appeal to them to have a saving relationship with Jesus.

Health

We must be careful not to come across in a legalistic way when presenting the subject of health (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Spending the whole time telling people why they should become vegetarian is not exactly Christ-centered.

Focus more on why Jesus is concerned with our physical health (3 John 2). One of the wonderful truths about Jesus is that He loves and cares for us personally. He is concerned not only about our spiritual life but also about our physical life here on earth.

Emphasize John 10:10, where Jesus expresses His desire for us to have a healthy, happy, and abundant life. Satan seeks to influence us to adopt habits that destroy health and ruin our happiness. Jesus seeks to protect us from such things and preserve our health and happiness.

You could picture Jesus as saying, *I created you. I formed your body with My own hands. It hurts Me to see you battling sickness, pain, and addictions. I am giving you some health principles to follow because I desire you have a good life. If you trust Me with your spiritual life, then trust Me with your physical life.*

When you present the subject of health from this perspective, Christ’s love for His created beings shines through clearly.

Jewelry and adornment

When it comes to the topic of adornment (1 Pet. 3:3, 4), too often we emphasize what we should not wear rather than what we should wear. Use Galatians 5:22, 23 to talk about the importance of putting on the character of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit. Emphasize how Jesus wants us to be a reflection of His character.

If we teach people to take off jewelry without teaching them to put on Christ, we are not enriching their lives spiritually. We do not want to create converts who wear no adornment on the outside but neither wear Christ on the inside. When Christ is put on in the heart, the outside will take care of itself.

The mark of the beast

The doctrine concerning the mark of the beast is not as difficult as it appears. Revelation 14:9-12 speaks about God’s commandments, which include the fourth commandment, and we have already established that the Sabbath is a Christ-centered doctrine. You will repeat many of those points in the mark of the beast message. The emphasis of this topic should be on more than the Sabbath, however. The emphasis should be on loving and following Jesus completely. The Sabbath is simply a tool that God uses to test that allegiance.

The mark of the beast message is really about surrender: Will I completely surrender my heart to Jesus and His teachings? Focus on the immeasurable love of Christ as revealed on Calvary. Show how Jesus surrendered all so that we might be saved. Tell the story of Gethsemane, when Jesus lay prostrate on the ground, sweating drops of blood, and yet cried, “Not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42, KJV). Make the appeal that Jesus is asking us to make that same surrender.

When Calvary is truly understood, the Sabbath, the mark, and the seal of God (Rev. 7:1-3) will fall into place naturally. Always bring it back to the Cross.

The antichrist

Tell people that Jesus is so concerned about our spiritual lives that He warned us about an antichrist power that would be working in this world (1 John 2:18–22). Explain that this power would seek to take Jesus’ place in our lives as the supreme authority and Savior from sin. Tell them how this happened in a very deceptive way throughout the Dark Ages, a period of more than a thousand years. Remind them that Jesus loves us too much to let us be deceived, so He gave us some prophecies to warn us of this power.

You may be wondering, “Well, what shall I do about identifying the papacy as the antichrist power?” Lift up the truth, but be sure to emphasize that God is not condemning any specific group of people. Jesus warns of a *system* of beliefs that usurps His authority and His Word. There are people of differing persuasions who are rendering selfless service to God and humanity and are living up to all the light they know. We need to acknowledge that.

The antichrist system, which came from Rome in the Middle Ages, can be narrowed down to three basic principles:

- The commandments of men are placed above the commandments of God.

- Traditions are placed above truth.
- Human authority is placed above Jesus’ authority.

These are the principles of the beast. When we follow these principles in our lives, we are following the beast, no matter who we are or what church we come from.

Show that the principles of Jesus are just the opposite. They include these:

- The commandments of God are placed above the commandments of men.
- Truth is above tradition.
- Jesus’ authority is placed above human authority.

Point the people to the Cross of Christ and invite them to make a choice. Invite them to choose between the principles of Jesus Christ and those of the antichrist.

The remnant

The subject of the remnant is an extremely important issue (Rev. 12:17). Unfortunately, it can come across in a very arrogant way. Jesus never conveyed a “holier than thou” attitude. Neither should we.

When you talk about the interdenominational Advent movement of the early 1800s, it is very important that you do not present any notion of anyone being superior to everyone else. Jesus recognized that there were other people living up to all the light they had. In John 10:16, Jesus said He had sheep in different folds, but He was calling them into His one fold.

Do not put down different churches. You will never win people’s hearts by doing so, and even those who are not Christians will be turned off. Acknowledge the good in other churches. Remember that during the Middle Ages and the Reformation, various churches were used by God to help restore truth one link at a time. Each church may not have had all the

truth, but each contributed toward its restoration.

Then share from Revelation 12 how, in these last days, God has raised up a movement to emphasize two of the most Christ-centered truths—Sabbath and the Second Coming—to illustrate the beauty of being in the presence of God. Explain the progress of the Advent movement to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Explain that this church is a movement made up of people from all different faith backgrounds who have decided to embrace the liberating joy of following Jesus and His truth in these end times (John 8:32). Show how Jesus can use this movement to fulfill His desire to unite His people.

Then share Jesus’ invitation in 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 18:4, where Christ invites us to come out of darkness and error and follow the Light of the world above everyone and everything else.

Conclusion

These are some simple ways to center biblical truths on Christ during evangelistic meetings. When we do this, I believe God will honor and bless our work. However, the best way to preach Christ in the doctrines is to have Christ in the center of your own life. When Jesus lives in your own heart in a deep and personal way, your preaching will come from a heart that knows Him intimately.

There is no substitute for this. It will have a powerful influence. You will no longer be just preaching. You will be sharing a testimony of how Jesus is your all in all. “Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart.”² You can reach their hearts only when Jesus lives in yours. 🙏

1 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 160.

2 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 437.

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