



Biblical Principles Holiness or Grace?

by Chuck Gianotti

Holiness and Grace. Oil and water? Which takes precedence over the other? Can we preach both without diluting one or the other? Is it possible to over-emphasize one to counter-balance a perceived over-attention to the other? How can we preach both and keep them in balance?

God is holy, the Scripture is very clear about that! As R.C. Sproul points out, "holiness" is the only attribute of God that is exclaimed in the triplicate, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8). In His presence Moses threw off his sandals, the seraphim covered their faces, Isaiah was "undone" and Peter cried out, "I am a sinful man." Saul was blinded and never forgot the holiness of his Lord and Savior, against whom he kicked. We are to walk in holiness, put on holiness and control our bodies in holiness, says Peter, Paul, James and the writer of Hebrews—for we are His holy temple and have been called to holiness. The Lord has a vested interest in this subject because 1) He bought us with the holy sacrifice of His Son, and 2) His Son will one day present us holy to Himself.

So, rightly we must preach, teach and practice holiness—and we, as elders, must expect holiness in those whom we shepherd. The standard is high, for since "...He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16 ESV).

But, there's a problem.

Those things are so easy to write about and to preach. But there is a problem. That problem is – well, to put it frankly, ME. Lest you be too critical of this author, the problem includes YOU as well. As elders, men in leadership roles, the most difficult thing about teaching on the holiness of God and His Son Jesus Christ, is the fact that we who speak on this subject fall far short of it, which can put us in the uncomfortable position of being hypocritical. So we need to tread carefully.

This is a significant issue, for our integrity as shepherd/leaders is on the line. I am not talking about false humility that gives pious lip-service to this dilemma. We may be self-delusional, but sooner or later the reality hits us in the face. The people we shepherd pick it up sooner than we do. As we endeavor to minister to God's people with a heart like the Great Shepherd's heart, we will invariably get close to the sheep (i.e. believers), and they get to know us, our voice and our ways—and that's the rub. They come to know us *too* well. They see when we model holiness (a modicum as that may be), but they also see when we exhibit unholiness. They see our warts, our blemishes, our insecurities—and our sinfulness. At this juncture, we have two options.

Option One

One is to cover over our unholiness, hide our

faults, pretend they are not there and even preach strongly against the very sins we struggle with ourselves. In my early ministry, a wise older believer counseled that you can sometimes tell what a preacher struggles with in his personal life by what he repeatedly rails against in his public ministry. In any event, this option is to somehow conceal from the people we lead the truth about ourselves. In effect, we can carry on our role as elders without ever owning up to our own spiritual failings. If I act the part of a person who is always holy, then maybe people will believe it is so. But this is precarious thinking.

Some may object that as men we don't want to "wear our emotions on our shirt-sleeves," as the saying goes. After all, we don't want to hang out all our dirty laundry for everyone to see—there are some things that are private and shouldn't be made public. This is true, but I am *not* talking here about disclosing the secret sins of our hearts (as much as

those things need to be dealt with). I am speaking more of those character issues at the heart of who we are. Things like selfishness,

Our integrity as shepherd/leaders is on the line ... the people we shepherd know us too well!

pride (in relation to spiritual gifts or position), insensitivity, "integrity tarnish", one-upmanship, envy, greed, callous hearts, anger and lust. The real man will be seen. And these are the things that directly affect our influence as shepherds of God's flock. Trying to cover them over is like putting paint on a fading, dilapidated old barn. The paint certainly makes it stand out more, but doesn't hide the fact that the barn is falling down. The fact of the matter is that the greater our efforts to conceal our sinfulness from people, the more hypocritical we appear to those very people. We simply cannot hide it for very long.

Of course, the ultimate solution, in the face of God's holiness is for us to "be holy." Yet, the message we give can bring condemnation on ourselves and puts us in line with the moralist of Romans 2:3 "Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?"

But won't people loose respect for us? That, unfortunately, was the concern of King Saul (1 Sam 15:30). But don't I need to be holy or at least appear to be holy, in order to preach about holiness? If that were the ultimate question, then none of us could ever preach on the subject; we would just have to let people discover holiness on their own as they read Scripture for themselves. The more important question is whether or not we are going to be honest! This is more than just glibly saying on occasion, "I'm not perfect." It is not really about saying anything in particular. Rather, this forces us to embrace the depths of our need for God's grace. This, I believe, is what Peter was

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Practical Ministry

Ministry That Edifies

by Jack Spender

In the previous article “Teaching in the Church,” we considered the importance of quality Bible teaching, especially the church’s primary teaching meeting, as well as some of the obstacles and hindrances to effective use of this time; problems about which elders must ever be watchful. In this article, I want to suggest some of the factors that can produce a truly edifying ministry of the Scriptures in the church.

Edification

First we must understand the word “edify.” It is linked to the idea of a building (or edifice) that is under construction. Since buildings go “up” with progress, the expression when applied to people is often rendered “build up,” as when good ministry builds up the local assembly. The old saying is true; “The Word of God builds the church.”

But since the church is really a collection of individuals, it follows that the church is built up when the individuals in it are build up or edified. Anyone wishing to explore this subject should certainly make a study of the book of Ephesians, especially chapter 4, where Paul links the work of gifted servants to a) the equipping of the saints and the upbuilding of the church in verse 12, b) the growing up of the individual believer into a closer relationship with Christ in verse 15 and c) the increase of the body which results from these in verse 16.

Spiritual Diet

Before we look at some things that encourage edifying ministry, let’s think briefly about the mechanism by which a healthy spiritual diet produces growth in the believer. Actually, in referring to the Christian as a “believer,” we have just discovered the answer! In Colossians 2:6 (KJV) we read: “As ye have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” How did we first receive the Lord? By faith in the One revealed to us in the message of the gospel. Only as we understood the message were we able to put faith in its object. In the same way, all other truth must come to believers in such a way that they can understand and believe, not with a mere mental assent, but with a life changing transformation of the mind. The first key, then, is in understanding. The message must be truthful and clear to be used by the Holy Spirit. The second key is believing, that is, receiving for ourselves what has been made plain.

Furthermore, as we think about those who explain God’s message to us, we must describe such ministry, not in terms of law, as in rules and lists of do’s and don’t’s, but of grace, knowing that God can use any honest effort. But since both nature and Scripture teach us that there is a clear link between

sowing and reaping, we ought to embrace Paul’s statement in I Cor. 14:12 as something of a theme for the whole subject: “seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.” Here are some areas in which excellence must be constantly pursued.

Suggestions for those who line up speakers

The ideal is for elders to feed their own flock personally. But others will likely be needed to help with the teaching load. Seek to engage speakers whose teachings are both faithful and relevant: faithful to the text, and relevant to the needs of the people. It will not be so helpful if doctrine is sound but application is cloudy or lacking. Also, there should be a good balance of topical studies and consecutive exposition of the Word. Some men find it difficult to work through a passage verse by verse. Seek over time to provide ministry that covers the “whole counsel of God,” not just the themes that are popular. Christians should desire some grasp of every book in the Bible. Wise shepherds

There should be a good balance of topical studies and consecutive exposition of the Word.

know the needs of the flock, and must be more concerned for those *needs* than the *wants* of the flock. Elders and teachers must make time to “labor in the Word and doctrine” (I Tim. 5:17). Elders need to think in terms of “Who can teach and challenge us in this area of need?” rather than “Who has this date open on their calendar?”

Suggestions regarding local speakers beside the elders:

Every assembly should be training its own men. Spiritual gifts must be discovered and developed. Consider asking young speakers to bring a short message in a home study group or at the prison or rest home ministry. Ask them to record a message on a cassette tape for the elders to listen to. There are many ways to get practice and nothing substitutes for it. Also, elders should ponder carefully the implications of Eph. 4:11,12. Are gifted evangelists, pastors, and teachers really “equipping the saints?” Too often men with these valuable gifts come and go, and the saints are no better equipped to shepherd others or teach the Word or witness to the lost than before the meetings were held.

Suggestions to hearers:

Since understanding is crucial, those who hear the Word should have some time during the week to ask questions and interact with what they have heard. This is one major benefit of small groups meeting in homes. One assembly with which I am familiar has a

lunch for all who can stay every Sunday so that the speaker can meet people and interact with them. In regard to younger speakers, elders must encourage the congregation to accept ministry from younger men. If illustrious speakers are constantly imported, how will the younger men be trained? Encourage people to bring their own Bibles. Pew Bibles or overuse of PowerPoint can inadvertently encourage laziness! Don’t get sidetracked on the question of Bible versions.

Thoughts for elders regarding the assembly as a good environment for the Word:

Is the seating and lighting arrangement a help or a hindrance? If a PA system is needed, is it easy to use and giving a clear sound? Have some brothers prayed with the speaker before the message? Are all parts of the service geared to enhance the message as the very Word of God to the people? Are messages consistent with the goals set forth in the Scriptures and valued by the elders for the health and growth of the sheep?

Suggestions for speakers:

Every teacher should seek to excel in edifying the church! You are not an entertainer, but a channel of truth to hungry hearts. Seek to be honest and sincere. Nourishing food is Christ-centered and glorifying to the Lord. It may bring conviction, but a critical, negative ministry cannot refresh hearts. Do not impose on the text what is not there. The platform is not a place to air personal gripes. I encourage young speakers to obtain a tape of a message they have given and listen as if hearing it for the first time. This can shed light on ways to improve. A simple outline of major and minor points can help bring order, and keep you accountable to the material to be covered. Resist the temptation to divide the audience into “saved” and “lost.” Only God knows the heart. There is power in the Word to meet every need present! The Holy Spirit is able to work mightily through the truth, even when we are unaware of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Conclusion

An assembly in which the elders take the preaching and teaching of the Word seriously is fortunate indeed. This good work will even include judging themselves when there are problems. Thinking back on the building analogy, if the carpenters are having good fellowship and enjoying their tools but the building is not going up, something is wrong. God will give wisdom if we lack it and ask. It is an unspeakable privilege “to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.” Acts 20:28.



Practical Ministry

We've Got Mail!

by Sharon Fleming

My seven-year-old daughter excitedly tore open the envelope addressed to her. Disappointment clouded her face as she examined a photocopied letter that began, "Our Sunday school class is learning about missionaries..." After requests for a family photo, a list of her favorite hobbies, and an explanation of what a missionary does, it ended, "We hope to encourage you by this letter."

In our 19-year missionary career, we have received letters from youth groups, prayer groups, Christian school students and home-schooled children. E-mail has multiplied these appeals. They have asked for everything from recipes to toy llamas. One notorious letter asked for information on the Colombian economy, government, peoples, language, and climate!

Sometimes these letters draw an involuntary sigh.

Our family knows that most who send these letters are sincere in their desire to know more about missions and to pray for us. We

don't want to stifle that interest! So we offer these suggestions to help your letters benefit both you and the missionary to whom you are writing.

1) Seek out missionaries commended by your assembly or by an assembly in your area. Better yet, offer hospitality to missionaries who are visiting at your church. Or maybe you will be traveling to the missionary's country; we have made good friends with a couple who came to our country to adopt children.

2) At first, simply ask for a few prayer requests or a copy of their most recent prayer letter. Ask them to add you to their mailing list if you know you will have time to pray for them regularly. When you "know" them a bit better, you can ask for photos, postcards, and so on. Get your general information about their regions from an encyclopedia or from *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk

(Bethany).

3) Do not send a generic, photocopied letter or broadcast e-mails. Write a personal letter. Answer about yourself the questions that you are asking the missionary: What are *your* hobbies and ministries?

4) Turn the tables: Offer information to the missionary. Do you love to cook? Perhaps a new missionary could use some "from scratch" recipes. Are you a web surfer? Offer to find sites with material the missionary needs.

5) If you are writing to the children of missionaries include a small gift. A pack of sugar-free gum or a page of stickers are hits in our house.

Missionaries want to be prayed for. They want to interest others in missions. If you are reasonable in your requests, they will be happy to answer and encourage you.



Leadership Principles

Great Leaders Accept Disagreement

When he was younger, George C. Marshall disagreed strongly (in fact, he made a strong rebuke) with his superior, General John J. Pershing and risked his career by doing so—it proved to be a pivotal encounter. Pershing was the elder statesman of the military coming out of World War I. Marshall was young but would eventually rise to similar stature during World War II.

Marshall's biographer writes: "Pershing had found an officer who would tell him the truth rather than attempt to gloss inadequacies. Marshall himself was to discover that the general was capable of bearing criticism impersonally, of weighing it without taking offense . . . Pershing expected Marshall to speak out, to advise, and, if he thought it necessary, to criticize. Marshall did so, discovering in the AEF commander a rare personal objectivity."

Of Pershing, Marshall said, "I have never seen a man who could listen to as much criticism . . . You could say what you pleased as long as it was straight, constructive criticism." Other men had influenced him, but in Pershing, Marshall found a personal model."

Marshall said, "General Pershing held no griefs at all. He might be very firm at the time, but if you convinced him, that was the end of that. He accepted that and you went ahead."

Two great men, two great leaders. One greatly influenced by the other. Marshall went on to become the second most influential American, next to Franklin D. Roosevelt, in determining the outcome of World War II. He was highly regarded, but popular history of the

war has assigned greater glory to other men, primarily those he mentored, whose names are more widely known: Eisenhower, Patton and MacArthur. To his dying day, Marshall was referred to with great respect by these men and everyone else who knew him as "The General." (*Taken from "General of the Army: George C. Marshall", by Ed Cray. Addendum: Marshall received the Nobel Peace Prize for devising the "Marshall Plan" which provided post-war funds for reconstructing Europe.*)

"I have never seen a man who could listen to as much criticism . . ."

As leaders, we are in spiritual conflict constantly if we understand the nature of our work correctly. Therefore, we need to become strong in our leadership. The ability to accept criticism is essential if we want to be effective in our shepherding and leading ministry. It certainly comes with the territory. However, greatness comes not just from weathering criticism, but using it for good. General Pershing learned this secret and encouraged frank, honest, constructive feedback—even if it meant he was wrong and needed to change.

Pershing's character in this regard influenced Marshall who in turn influenced others who became great leaders. This is similar to what Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to

faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Ti 2:2 ESV)

Marshall's *humbleness* is noteworthy, as well. He never put himself forward, though he rose steadily in power. When President Roosevelt needed to appoint a supreme commander for the Allied forces, he turned to Marshall who by then was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Roosevelt was torn, as his biographer points out for he wanted Marshall's personal and reassuring presence in Washington, but also knew that it would be an insult to the man if he appointed anyone else. So, the president left it for Marshall to decide. It was his for the taking.

However, Marshall would not even hint at putting himself forward, feeling this to be a consummate impropriety. Instead, he recommended Dwight D. Eisenhower for the job. Popular history went on to give greater accolades to Eisenhower as the hero of the war. Yet many would argue that Marshall was the true military greatness behind the war. Personal glory was not his goal. The Allies won the war!

In the spiritual realm, humbleness may mean that we do not get the accolades or attention that others receive. However, our goal as leaders must never be for our own personal advancement. Someone has well said, "There is no limit to what can be done for God if you don't care who gets the credit." Happy is the elder who promotes the work of God in others and resists the temptation to gather glory for himself.



Holiness or Grace *(cont. from page 1)*

getting at when he wrote, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). The very real spiritual truth is that God’s holiness causes us to face our desperate need for being gripped by His grace.

Option Two

The other option, therefore, is to acknowledge both holiness *and* grace. God’s holiness shows us our need, grace meets that need. The more we understand the first, the greater we appreciate the second. I once heard a Christian, who did not understand this, say, “Sure, I need God’s grace, but I don’t need it as bad as my obnoxious non-Christian neighbor does!” There is a fundamental problem with that way of thinking. The apostle Paul said, “...the grace of our Lord overflowed for me ...” (1 Tim 1:14). Paul needed much grace! The one who is forgiven much, loves much and extols the grace of God.

Because Paul understood the true nature of God’s holiness, he was able to preach God’s grace so passionately. He spoke in Scripture of the concept of “holy” and “holiness” 50 times in his writings, and of “grace” 85 times. Everything he did was a consummate privilege because of God’s gracious work in his undeserving life. He deserved none of it, for he knew that apart from the Lord he was but a sinner sold into the slavery of rebellion against God. He began every one of his letters with an appeal to God’s grace (“grace to you from God”) and closed his letters with a similar appeal (“grace of God be with you”). Paul was all about “grace.”

So, which is it that we should preach? God’s holiness needs to be preached. This does two things—it gives us an accurate view of God, and a “sober” view of ourselves (Isaiah 6, Romans 12:3). He is not a spiritual push-over and we are not as holy as we think

we are. But holiness by itself leaves us spiritually depressed, for we fail utterly. With God’s holiness, we must also preach and model grace. To do otherwise fosters a *form* of godliness (see Colossians 2:3), but that form is meaningless for true spiritual behavior. Non-Christians can smell it a mile away. Young people flee from it the first chance they get.

The holiness of God does not draw people to the Lord—it repels them. A true audience with God’s holiness humbles rather than emboldens. This is where grace comes in. “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Grace attracts! But, it only attracts those who understand holiness. All others mock both grace (think of the prodigal’s older brother). And in doing that, they mock the Giver of grace!

Yes, let us preach both holiness and grace, keeping them in proper balance. His holiness shows us our need of His grace. We cannot preach one without the other.



From the Q-Files

Accepting Others

A story said to originate in a Russian Orthodox monastery has an older monk telling a younger one: “I have finally learned to accept people as they are. Whatever they are in the world, a prostitute, a prime minister, it is all the same to me. But sometimes I see a stranger coming up the road, and I say, ‘Oh, Jesus Christ, is it you again?’”

On Atheism

Paradoxically, what propels people toward atheism is above all a sense of revulsion against the excesses and failures of organized religion. Atheism is ultimately a worldview of fear—fear, often merited, of what might happen if religious maniacs were to take over the world.” *Alister McGrath*

On Preaching

“Remember, the Bible is more interesting than you are.” *Lutheran theologian Richard Lischer to his homiletics students.*

Procrastination and Integrity

An eight-year old boy repeatedly asked his father if he could be baptized. “Wait,” the father would reply, not sure whether the boy really understood the significance. After 6 months of repeating his request, the boy finally responded, “But, Dad you’ve always told me to obey the Lord, and He says in the Bible I should be baptized.” At this, the father joyfully consented and had the boy speak to an elder. Turns out there was an upcoming baptism already planned for three weeks away.

The elder said he would talk with the other elders and get back with an answer. The

boy was excited! But, the day before the baptism was scheduled unfortunately, he had not yet heard from the elders. “Did they forget? Did I do something wrong?”

Procrastination becomes an issue of integrity when it comes to shepherding the flock of God. It conveys disrespect to the body of believers, leads to loss of respect for the elders, and can seriously hinder the work of the Lord. Put simply, it is never good to leave people “hanging.” Elders should respond to all requests and concerns in a timely manner, even if to say they are still discussing the matter or to explain why there is a delay.



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