

## *Preaching*

During the Spring of 1785, Berridge wrote a letter to Charles Simeon who, at that time, was contemplating (what was for him) the momentous step of preaching as an itinerant, as Berridge himself had been doing for some time. This, of course, for an Anglican, was contrary to Church law, and was bound to bring criticism.<sup>1</sup> In this letter, Berridge advised Simeon as to what is required in an itinerant ministry. In fact, the same could – and should – be said for a settled ministry, as regards addressing sinners with the gospel, and, as such, Berridge’s thoughts are highly relevant today.<sup>2</sup> There is far too little preaching of the gospel, even from pulpits in churches whose Confessions are orthodox on the gospel. What is it to preach the gospel? Indeed, what is preaching!<sup>3</sup> And although Berridge was speaking of preaching in the sense of ‘pulpit work’, since every believer is a priest and a minister, every believer is a preacher of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, what Berridge said is valuable for all preachers – all believers, therefore – today. What is involved in preaching the gospel?

Unfortunately, Berridge was convinced of the necessity – or, at least, the advisability – of preaching the law, the Mosaic law, before addressing men with the gospel. While this has been typical of the Reformed and many evangelicals ever since the days of John Calvin, who set this principle in concrete – he being followed by the

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<sup>1</sup> Simeon eventually decided against it, whereas Berridge spent years in such a ministry.

<sup>2</sup> I have addressed the subject in my *Offer; Septimus; No Safety*, and I will have more to say on the matter in a book I have nearly finished on Sandemanianism.

<sup>3</sup> I use the ‘!’ to express my ongoing concern that ‘What is preaching?’ needs urgent attention today. See the previous note.

<sup>4</sup> See my *The Priesthood*.

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Puritans – and while it remains ‘received’ wisdom to this very day, it is entirely without scriptural support. There is no instance of any biblical preacher preaching the Mosaic law to unconverted Gentiles. Moreover, there is no scriptural passage which says that it is essential to preach the law before the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Rather, as Paul declared:

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16).

What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5).<sup>6</sup>

Paul knew nothing of having to preach Moses before preaching Christ – even to Jews, let alone Gentiles. There is nothing in Scripture to justify the thought that the law prepares sinners for Christ. Galatians 3:24 certainly does

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<sup>5</sup> See my *Christ* and my articles against preparationism. When observing a man preaching the ten commandments in the open air, I got the distinct impression (entirely unintended by the preacher, who would have been horrified by the thought) that I was being told that salvation is by works. No wonder, in light of Rom. 7:10; 10:5.

<sup>6</sup> Berridge, of course, knew this. His biographer, Richard Whittingham, recorded that after Berridge’s conversion, his style of preaching radically changed, with remarkable converting effect upon his congregation: ‘So confirmed was [Berridge] thereby... that he determined in future to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified’. He was distressed that before his conversion he had wasted so many years preaching works, and he immediately, and with joy, burnt his old sermons (Pibworth: *Letters* pp41-42; see also p402). Speaking of the law, Berridge confessed: ‘Again I have been in Moses’ chair, and again in Moses’ school. I have loved him and preached him again, and he has flogged me again and again for my pains’. Pibworth attributes this to ‘seeking [progressive] sanctification from the law rather than Christ’ (Pibworth: *Letters* p81). While I agree with this, I think it goes wider than that.

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not teach it.<sup>7</sup> Berridge, however, mistakenly put preaching the law before addressing sinners with the gospel. He told Simeon:

When you open your commission, begin with ripping up the audience, and Moses will lend you a carving knife, which may be often whetted at his grindstone. Lay open the universal sinfulness of nature, the darkness of the mind, the forwardness of the tempers, the earthliness and sensuality of the affections. Speak of the evil of sin in its nature, its rebellion against God as our benefactor, and contempt of his authority and love. Declare the evil of sin in its effects, bringing all our sickness, pains and sorrows, all the evil we feel, and all the evils we fear. All inundations, fires, famines, pestilences, brawls, quarrels, fighting, wars, with death to close these present sorrows, and hell to receive all that die in sin.

While it is essential to show the sinner his sin and his dire condition before God, it is Berridge's emphasis on the law of Moses to accomplish this that lacks scriptural support.

Even so, he went on:

Lay open the spirituality of the law, and its extent, reaching every thought, word and action, and declaring every transgression, whether of omission or commission, deserving of death. Declare man's utter helplessness to change his heart [Berridge had 'nature'], or to make his peace [with God – DG]. Pardon and holiness must come from the Saviour. Acquaint them with the searching eye of God, watching us continually, spying out every thought, word and action, noting them down in the book of his remembrance, bringing every secret work into judgement, whether it be good or evil.

While I do not deny that we can use the Mosaic law in addressing sinners with the gospel, it is the insistence on the necessity of preaching the law which is unbiblical. In any case, and far more important, sin is not merely

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<sup>7</sup> See my 'Three Verses Misunderstood'.

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breaking the ten commandments. Indeed, the ultimate sin is the sinner's refusal of the gospel offer and so to trust Christ. As Christ complained:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37).

You refuse to come to me that you may have life (John 5:40).<sup>8</sup>

And it is not only the Jews. As he explained:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed (John 3:14-20).

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day (John 12:48).

In light of this, it is not surprising to find Christ declaring that the source of conviction of sin is not the law but the unbeliever's refusal to submit to him as Saviour and Lord:

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<sup>8</sup> See also Luke 14:16-24; John 12:31-38.

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When [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin... because they do not believe in me (John 16:8-9).

And the writer to the Hebrews made the position as clear as noonday:

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God... See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven (Heb. 12:15,25).<sup>9</sup>

‘Refusing him’? As the apostle declared, God can say:

All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people (Rom. 10:21).

Clearly, from the context of Romans 10, what is said to Israel (Rom. 10:21) the apostle applies to all. God offers Christ to sinners and complains that sinners refuse him, refuse Christ. And since refusal of Christ is the condemning sin, the damning sin, preaching Christ must be the way to bring home to sinners their dire condition. It is the apostolic way (Rom. 10:6–21; 2 Cor. 5:19 – 6:2. Go over the addresses to sinners in the Acts and see how the early preachers approached men.<sup>10</sup>

Berridge then moved from the law to the gospel. And how! He was explicit: preachers must preach the gospel.

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<sup>9</sup> I acknowledge that these words were written to believers, but: ‘It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And: “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”’ (1 Pet. 4:17-18).

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 10:17-27 does not obviate this. As I have said, all Scripture – properly nuanced – can and should be used when addressing sinners. It is the insistence on law-preaching before the gospel in order to prepare sinners for Christ that is the mistake. And one swallow does not make a summer.

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More precisely, they must preach Christ, and preach him not merely with the lips:

When your hearers have been well harrowed, and the clumps begin to fall (which is seen by their hanging down the head),<sup>11</sup> then bring out your Christ, and bring him out from the heart, through the lips, and tasting of his grace while you publish it. Now lay open the Saviour's almighty power to soften the heart, and give it true repentance, to bring pardon to the broken heart, and the spirit of prayer to the prayerless heart, holiness to the filthy heart, and faith to the unbelieving heart.

I pause. Here, alas, Berridge shows some confusion. According to what he has already said, these sinners are well softened, softened, according to him, by the preaching of the law. But, as he now says, Christ himself softens the sinner's heart by his gospel. The lesson is plain: in order to convict men of sin, preach Christ, and in order to convert convicted sinners, preach Christ. In other words, preach Christ to sinners in every condition.<sup>12</sup> In short, Berridge was wrong to say: 'When your hearers have been well harrowed, and the clumps begin to fall (which is seen by their hanging down the head), then bring out your Christ'. Bring him out from the word 'go'! And preach him all the way through.

This is very important. C.H.Spurgeon advised his students to vary the times they tackled the sinner – sometimes doing it at the very start of the sermon.<sup>13</sup> Why

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<sup>11</sup> Berridge was using an illustration drawn from agriculture, one which would have been well understood by the villagers of the day: the harrow (or the frost) breaks up the clods of earth and thus prepares a fine tilth for sowing the seed.

<sup>12</sup> I would extend this to say: 'To sinners and saints, preach Christ'. As I have shown, this was Paul's principle (1 Cor. 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5). See the chapter: 'Christ Is All'.

<sup>13</sup> The writer to the Hebrews devotes many verses to setting out the glories of the high priesthood of Christ, but notice that he starts – and ends – with the application of his doctrine. See Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-37.

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not make it the opening remarks, before he's got time to get his boiled sweet unwrapped and safely popped into his mouth? The sinner knows what's coming towards the end, is waiting for it, and gets his armour fastened in good time. Spurgeon reminds us that we need to catch the sinner unawares, pierce him before he has a chance to fasten his defences:

Very little common sense is spent over this matter. Under certain ministries, there is a set time for speaking to sinners, and this comes as regularly as the hour of noon. A few crumbs of the feast are thrown to the dogs under the table at the close of the discourse, and they treat your crumbs as you treat them; namely, with courteous indifference. Why should the warning word be always at the hinder end of the discourse when hearers are most likely to be weary? Why give men notice to buckle on their harness so as to be prepared to repel our attack? When their interest is excited, and they are least upon the defensive, then let fly a shaft at the careless, and it will frequently be more effectual than a whole flight of arrows shot against them at a time when they are thoroughly encased in armour of proof. Surprise is a great element in gaining attention and fixing a remark upon the memory, and times for addressing the careless should be chosen with an eye to that fact... Do not close a single sermon without addressing the ungodly, but at the same time set yourself seasons for a determined and continuous assault upon them, and proceed with all your soul to the conflict. On such occasions aim distinctly at immediate conversions.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, while Berridge spoke of Christ's power 'to soften the heart, and give it true repentance, to bring pardon to the broken heart, and the spirit of prayer to the prayerless heart, holiness to the filthy heart, and faith to the unbelieving heart', I would change his sentence and

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<sup>14</sup> And so on. C.H.Spurgeon: 'Conversion' in *Second Series of Lectures to My Students...*, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1885, pp187-188.

speaking of Christ's power 'to soften the heart, and give it true repentance, and [to give] faith to the unbelieving heart, to bring pardon to the broken heart, and the spirit of prayer to the prayerless heart, [and] holiness to the filthy heart'. Repentance and faith must come together, and come very early in experience – certainly before 'pardon... the spirit of prayer... [and] holiness'.

Berridge went on:

Let them know that all the treasures of grace are lodged in Jesus Christ, for the use of poor needy sinners, and that he is full of love as well as power, that he turns no sinner away from his gate, but receives all comers kindly, loves to bless them, and bestows all his blessings tithe-free.<sup>15</sup> Farmers and country people chop at that [argue with it]. Here you must wave the gospel flag, and magnify the Saviour proudly [showing that you have a high opinion of his worth, dignity, majesty]; speak *ore rotundo* [with a full, round voice, without mincing your words, pulling no punches] that his blood can [and will for all who believe – DG] wash away the foulest stains, and his grace subdue the stoutest corruptions. Exhort the people to seek grace directly [immediately], constantly, diligently, and acquaint them [let them know] that all who thus seek shall find the salvation of God [Isa. 55:6-7; 2 Cor. 6:2].<sup>16</sup>

Note Berridge's 'directly'. This is so important. Sinners must be commanded, invited, exhorted, pleaded with, urged to trust Christ, and to do so at once, now!<sup>17</sup> And they must be assured that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Rom. 10:13). Allow no delay! Certainly never preach in a way that encourages it.

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<sup>15</sup> Berridge was referring to the tax levied on all (whether or not they attended the Established Church) to pay the State clergy. Christ offers salvation to sinners freely, without money and without price (Isa. 55:1-7).

<sup>16</sup> Pibworth: *Letters* pp342-343.

<sup>17</sup> As above, I hope to publish against the mistaken notion of 'seeking'.



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Joseph Hart got it right:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, joined with power.  
He is able, he is able;  
He is willing; doubt no more.*

*Come, ye needy, come, and welcome,  
God's free bounty glorify;  
True belief and true repentance,  
Every grace that brings you nigh.  
Without money, without money  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness he requireth  
Is to feel your need of him.  
This he gives you, this he gives you,  
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
Bruised and mangled by the fall;  
If you tarry till you're better,  
You will never come at all.  
Not the righteous, not the righteous;  
Sinners Jesus came to call.*

*Lo, th'incarnate God, ascended;  
Pleads the merit of his blood!  
Venture on him; venture wholly,  
Let no other trust intrude.  
None but Jesus, none but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good.*

No sense of delay in that!

And John Stocker set out the biblical encouragement for sinners:

*The door of [God's] mercy stands open all day,  
To the poor and the needy who knock by the way;  
No sinner shall ever be empty sent back,  
Who comes seeking mercy for Jesus's sake.*

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On 26th November 1771, Berridge wrote to David Edwards, saying that he had:

...got a sight of the Calvinistical doctrines at last...  
However, through grace I am not run mad with  
doctrines. I do not preach or sing of John Calvin, but of  
Jesus Christ; he is the dear subject of my hymns and  
sermons.<sup>18</sup>

How vital this is! How relevant! So many today seem to think – at least, they give me the impression that they think – that their job, on entering a pulpit, is to set out doctrine, often in a confessional sense (Heidelberg, Westminster, 1689 or whatever), and give us a lecture on it, or simply analyse the text of Scripture, and hand us down some sort of magazine article. Others think they must preach experience. Others preach rule, rule, rule – I call it recipe or penny-in-the-slot preaching. The apostolic way is clear. We must preach Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5). We know that ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11). No wonder then that Paul thundered:

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our  
Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto  
me, and I unto the world (Gal. 6:14).

Let us make sure that we follow the apostle, and glory only in Christ crucified, and so preach Christ crucified to all. Finally, it surely goes without saying, this must not be confined to the pulpit.

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<sup>18</sup> Pibworth: *Letters* 181. For much more, see ‘Preaching’ in the index (Pibworth: *Letters* p462).