

Two Examples of Preaching Particular Redemption and the Free Offer

I have made the point that we should not enter into detailed explorations of God's decrees in our preaching to sinners – not, I hasten to add (and now repeat), that we should never mention such when addressing sinners. But as I have explained, this must be done in the right spirit. And what is that right spirit? To illustrate what I have in mind, I reproduce extracts from two preachers who, having set out the glories of the redemption which Christ accomplished, addressed sinners with the free offer. I have chosen George Whitefield's sermon on 'The Lord our righteousness' (Jer. 23:6), and Jonathan Edwards' *History of Redemption*.³⁵⁷

Take the Englishman first.

Whitefield, grieving that 'the doctrines of grace, especially the personal all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus, is [*sic*] but too seldom, too slightly mentioned', spelled out what he was talking about: 'Being God and man in one person, [Christ] wrought out a full, perfect and sufficient righteousness for all to whom it was to be imputed'; in other words, particular redemption. Having introduced the subject what did Whitefield do with it? Having indicated at the start of his sermon that his business was to give 'an exhortation to all to come to Christ by faith, that they may be enabled to say... "the Lord our righteousness"', he issued a challenge to his hearers: 'Why then will you not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that so he may become the Lord *your* righteousness?' He came to the biting point:

It is time for me to come a little closer to your consciences. Brethren though some may be offended at this doctrine, and may account it foolishness, yet, to many of you, I doubt not but it is precious... But give me leave to ask you one question: Can you say, the Lord our righteousness? I say, the Lord *our* righteousness. For welcoming this doctrine in your heads, without receiving the Lord Jesus Christ savingly by a lively faith into your hearts, will but increase your

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damnation. As I have often told you, so I tell you again – an unapplied Christ, is no Christ at all. Can you then, with believing Thomas, cry out: ‘My Lord, and my God’?

Whitefield probed his hearers as to their sanctification as well as justification, showing, by a series of questions, the need of conviction and longing after Christ – and calling for it:

Were you ever made to abhor yourselves for your actual and original sins, and to loathe your own righteousness, for, as the prophet beautifully expresses it, ‘your righteousness is as filthy rags’? Were you ever made to see and admire the all-sufficiency of Christ’s righteousness, and excited by the Spirit of God to hunger and thirst after it? Could you ever say: My soul is athirst for Christ, indeed, even for the righteousness of Christ? O when shall I come to appear before the presence of my God in the righteousness of Christ! nothing but Christ! nothing but Christ! Give me Christ, O God, and I am satisfied! My soul shall praise you for ever.

Was this ever the language of your hearts?... Were you ever enabled to reach out the arm of faith, and embrace the blessed Jesus in your souls, so that you could say: ‘My beloved is mine, and I am his’? If so, fear not, whoever you are. Hail, all hail, you happy souls! The Lord, the Lord Christ, the everlasting God, is your righteousness. Christ has justified you, who is he that condemns you? Christ has died for you, more, rather, is risen again, and ever lives to make intercession for you. Being now justified by his grace, you have peace with God, and shall, before long, be with Jesus in glory, reaping everlasting and unspeakable fruits both in body and soul... O think of the love of Christ in dying for you!... Think of the greatness of the gift, as well as of the giver!... O think of his dying love!... ‘Why me, Lord? why me?’... why is the Lord my righteousness?

Before turning to sinners, Whitefield concluded his address to believers, confessing: ‘My friends, I trust I feel somewhat of a sense of God’s distinguishing love upon my heart; therefore I must divert a little from rejoicing with you, to invite poor Christless sinners to come to him, and accept his righteousness, that they may have life’. And this is how he did it:

Alas, my heart almost bleeds! What a multitude of precious souls are now before me! How shortly must all be ushered into eternity! And yet, O cutting thought! were God now to require all your souls, how few, comparatively speaking, could really say, the Lord *our* righteousness.

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And do you think, O sinners, that you will be able to stand in the day of judgement, if Christ be not your righteousness! No, that alone is the wedding garment in which you must appear. O Christless sinners, I am distressed for you! The desires of my soul are enlarged. O that this may be an accepted time! that the Lord may be your righteousness! For whither would you flee, if death should find you naked? Indeed, there is no hiding yourselves from his presence. The pitiful fig-leaves of your own righteousness will not cover your nakedness, when God shall call you to stand before him. Adam found them ineffectual, and so will you. O think of death! O think of judgement! Yet a little while, and time shall be no more; and then what will become of you, if the Lord be not your righteousness? Do you think that Christ will spare you? No, he that formed you, will have no mercy on you. If you are not of Christ, if Christ is not your righteousness, Christ himself shall pronounce you damned. And can you bear to think of being damned by Christ? Can you bear to hear the Lord Jesus say to you: 'Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil, and his angels'? Can you live, do you think, in everlasting burnings?... Can you bear to depart from Christ? O that heart-piecing thought!... What must it be to be banished from him to all eternity?

But thus it must be, if Christ be not your righteousness; for God's justice must be satisfied; and, unless Christ's righteousness is imputed and applied to you here, you must hereafter be satisfying the divine justice in hell torments eternally; indeed, Christ himself shall condemn you to that place of torment. And how cutting is that thought! I think I see poor, trembling, Christless wretches, standing before the bar of God, crying out... but all in vain. Christ himself shall pronounce the irrevocable sentence. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, let me persuade you to close with Christ, and never rest till you can say, 'the Lord our righteousness'. Who knows but that the Lord may have mercy on, indeed, abundantly pardon you?... If the Lord gives you [faith], you will by it receive Christ, with his righteousness, and his all... For are you sinners? So am I. Are you the chief of sinners? So am I... And yet the Lord (for ever adored be his rich, free, and sovereign grace!) the Lord is my righteousness. Come, then, O young men, who (as I acted once myself) are playing the prodigal... come home, come home, and leave your swine's trough. Feed no longer on the husks of sensual delights; for Christ's sake arise, and come home! [The]³⁵⁸ heavenly Father now calls you. See yonder the best robe, even the righteousness of his dear Son, awaits you. See it, view it again and again. Consider at how dear a rate it was purchased, even by the blood of [Christ]. Consider what great need you have of it. You are lost, undone, damned for ever, without it. Come then, poor, guilty prodigals,

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come home... O that God would now bow the heavens and come down! Descend, O Son of God, descend; and as you have shown in me such mercy, O let your blessed Spirit apply your righteousness to some young prodigals now before you, and clothe their naked souls with your best robe!

But I must speak a word to you, young maidens, as well as young men... Which of you can say, the Lord is my righteousness? Which of you was ever concerned to be dressed in this robe of invaluable price, and without which you are no better than whited sepulchres in the sight of God? Let not then so many of you, young maidens, any longer forget your chief and only ornament. O seek for the Lord to be your righteousness, or otherwise burning will soon be upon you, instead of beauty!

And what shall I say to you of a middle age... who, with all your gettings, have not yet received the Lord to be your righteousness?... Seek for the Lord to be your righteousness, a righteousness that will entitle you to life everlasting. I see, also, many hoary heads here, and perhaps the most of them cannot say, the Lord is my righteousness. O grey-headed sinners, I could weep over you!... You not know that the Lord is your righteousness; O haste then, haste you aged sinners, and seek an interest in redeeming love! Alas, you have one foot already in the grave, your glass³⁵⁹ is just [about] run out, your sun is just [about] going down, and it will set and leave you in an eternal darkness, unless the Lord be your righteousness! Flee then, O flee for your lives! Be not afraid. All things are possible with God. If you come, though it be at the eleventh hour, Christ Jesus will never cast you out. Seek then for the Lord to be your righteousness... But I must not forget the lambs of the flock... I know [my Lord] will be angry with me, if I do not tell them, that the Lord may be their righteousness... Do not think that you are too young to be converted. Perhaps many of you may be nine or ten years old, and yet cannot say, the Lord is our righteousness; which many have said, though younger than you. Come, then, while you are young. Perhaps you may not live to be old. Do not wait for other people. If your fathers and mothers will not come to Christ, you come without them. Let children lead them, and show them how the Lord may be their righteousness. Our Lord Jesus loved little children... I pray God will make you willing in good time to take the Lord for your righteousness.

Here, then, I could conclude; but I must not forget the poor [slaves]; no, I must not. Jesus Christ has died for them, as well as for others...³⁶⁰

O that you would seek the Lord to be your righteousness! Who knows but he may be found of you? For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free; even you may be the children of God, if you

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believe in Jesus... The eunuch belonging to the queen of Candace... believed. The Lord was his righteousness. He was baptised... You also believe, and you shall be saved. Christ Jesus is the same now as he was yesterday, and he will wash you in his own blood. Go home then,³⁶¹ turn the words of the text into a prayer, and entreat the Lord to be your righteousness. Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly, into all our souls! Amen, Lord Jesus, amen and amen!³⁶²

So much for the Englishman.

Now for the New Englander. Edwards, having set out what he was writing about – namely, ‘the preparation and purpose, the application and success of Christ’s redemption’ – spoke of ‘the effect’ of this redemption ‘wrought on the souls of the redeemed’. By ‘this effect’, he meant ‘the application of redemption with respect to the souls of particular persons, in converting, justifying, sanctifying and glorifying them. By these things, they are actually redeemed, and receive the benefit of the work in its effects... as God carries on the work of converting the souls of fallen men... “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30)’. That is, one of the ends ‘of this great work’, ‘another great design of God in the work of redemption, was to gather together in one all things in Christ, in heaven and in earth; *i.e.*, all elect creatures; to bring all elect creatures... to a union one to another in one body, under one head, and to unite all together in one body to God the Father... God designed by this work to perfect and complete the glory of all the elect by Christ’.

Edwards, having dwelt at large upon what was involved in the preparation for – and accomplishment of – Christ’s redemption, came to what he called the ‘improvement’ or application and use of the truth. ‘I begin’, he said, ‘with... reproof’. He made his meaning clear. He had three sorts of sinners in mind. He was going to give ‘a reproof of unbelief, of self-righteousness, and of a careless neglect of the salvation of Christ’. First, unbelief:

How greatly do these things reprove those who do not believe in, but reject, the Lord Jesus Christ! *i.e.*, all those who do not heartily receive him... Let me now call upon such to consider how great their sin in thus rejecting Jesus Christ. You slight the glorious person... You have been guilty of slighting that great Saviour, who, after such preparation,

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actually accomplished the purchase of redemption... This is the person you reject and despise. You make light of all the glory of his person, and of all the glorious love of God the Father in sending him into the world, and all his wonderful love appearing in the whole of this affair... Sinners sometimes are ready to wonder why unbelief should be looked upon as a great sin; but if you consider what you have heard, how can you wonder? If this Saviour is so great, and this work so great, and such great things have been done in order to it, truly there is no cause of wonder that the rejection of this Saviour is so provoking to God. It brings greater guilt than the sins of the worst of heathens, who never heard of those things, nor have had this Saviour offered to them.

Edwards then moved to those ‘who, instead of believing in Christ, trust in themselves for salvation’. He exposed the madness of such a course, the insult it is to God. To think! You are sinners, ‘poor, worthless, vile and polluted, yet you arrogantly take upon you that very work for which the only-begotten Son of God became man’. Edwards, having painted the background, having shown what preparations God made for the coming of the Saviour, and what works Christ undertook to accomplish redemption, demanded:

How must such arrogance appear in the sight of Christ, whom it cost so much. It was not to be obtained even by him, so great and glorious a person, at a cheaper rate than his going through a sea of blood, and passing through the midst of the furnace of God’s wrath. And how vain must your arrogance appear in the sight of God, when he sees you imagining yourself sufficient, and your worthless, polluted performance excellent enough, for the accomplishing of that work of his own Son.

Edwards showed that such a course is not only defiant, but foolish: ‘Alas! how blind are natural men! and especially how vain are the thoughts which they have of themselves! How ignorant of their own littleness and pollution! What great things do they assume to themselves!’ He exposed the utter folly of it: ‘In attempting to work out redemption for yourself, you attempt a greater thing than’, as he had put it a moment earlier, ‘the greatest thing that ever God himself did’. In short: ‘You take upon you to do the very greatest and most difficult part of this work, *viz.*, to purchase redemption’. Edwards was scathing of such presumption:

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If all the angels in heaven had been sufficient for this work, would God have set himself to effect such things as he did in order to [accomplish] it? and would he ever have sent his own Son, the Creator of the angels, into the world, to have done and suffered such things?

What self-righteous persons take to themselves, is the same work that Christ was engaged in when he was in his agony and bloody sweat, when he died on the cross, which was the greatest thing that ever the eyes of angels beheld. Great as it is, [the self-righteous] imagine they can do the same that Christ accomplished by it. Their self-righteousness does in effect charge Christ's offering up himself in these sufferings, as the greatest instance of folly that ever men or angels saw, instead of being the most glorious display of the divine wisdom and grace...

Is it any wonder, then, that a self-righteous spirit is so represented in Scripture, and spoken of, as that which is most fatal to the souls of men?

Edwards then turned to those who 'neglect the salvation of Christ. These live a senseless kind of life, neglect the business of religion and their own souls, not taking any course to get an interest in Christ, or what he has done and suffered, or any part in that glorious salvation he has purchased. They have their minds taken up about the gains of the world, or the vanities and pleasures of youth, and make light of what they hear of Christ's salvation... that they do not... so much as seek after it'.

Edwards contrasted this attitude with that of many in the Old Testament:

Prophets, and kings, and righteous men [who had] their minds so much taken up with the prospect, that the purchase of salvation was to be wrought out in ages long after their death; and will you neglect it when it is actually accomplished?... Indeed, your sin is extremely aggravated in the sight of God... He has put you under a more glorious dispensation, has given you a more clear revelation of Christ and his salvation, and yet you neglect all these advantages, and go on a careless course of life, as though nothing had been done, no such proposals and offers had been made to you.

Noting how even 'the angels', even though they gain no saving benefit for it, have 'been so engaged about this salvation', Edwards drew the lesson:

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Now, shall these take so much notice of this redemption, and of the purchaser, who need it not for themselves, and have no immediate concern or interest in it, or offer of it; and will you, to whom it is offered, and who are in such extreme necessity of it, neglect and take no notice of it?

Did Christ labour so hard, and suffer so much to procure this salvation, and it is not worth the while for you to be at some labour in seeking it? Did our salvation³⁶³ lie with such weight upon the mind of Christ, as to induce him to become man, to suffer even death itself, in order to procure it? And is it not worth the while for you, who need this salvation, and must perish eternally without it, to take earnest pains to obtain an interest in it after it is procured, and all things are ready?

Shall the great God be so concerned about this salvation... and when all is said and done, is it not worth your seeking after? What great, what wonderful things has he done... to make way for the procuring of this salvation! And when... the great Saviour [at the right time] comes, passing through a long series of reproach and suffering, and then suffering all the waves and billows of God's wrath for men's sins, inasmuch as they overwhelmed his soul; after all these things [were] done to procure salvation for sinners, is it not worthy of your being so much concerned about it, but that it should be thrown aside, and made nothing of, compared with worldly gain, gay clothing, or youthful diversions, and other such trifling things?

O! that you who live negligent of this salvation, would consider what you do!... Heb. 2:3... Acts 13:41... God looks on you as great enemies of the cross of Christ, as adversaries and despisers of all the glory of this great work. And if God has made such account of the glory of salvation... in order to prepare the way for the glory of his Son in this affair, how little account will he make of the lives and souls of ten thousand such opposers and despisers as you, who continue impenitent, when your welfare stands in the way of that glory! Why surely you shall be dashed to pieces as a potter's vessel, and trodden down as the mire of the streets. God may, through wonderful patience, bear with hardened careless sinners for a while; but he will not long bear with such despisers of his dear Son, and his great salvation, the glory of which he has had so much at heart, before he will utterly consume without remedy or mercy.

Edwards finally turned to offer 'encouragement to burdened souls to put their trust in Christ for salvation':

To all such as are not careless and negligent, but make seeking an interest in Christ their main business, being sensible in some measure of their necessity, and afraid of the wrath to come; to such, what has

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been said on this subject [the history of redemption] holds forth great matter of encouragement, to venture their souls on the Lord Jesus Christ. And as motives proper to excite you so to do, let me lead you to consider two things in particular.

1. The completeness of the purchase which has been made. You have heard that this work of purchasing salvation was wholly finished during the time of Christ's humiliation. When Christ rose from the dead, and was exalted from that abasement to which he submitted for our³⁶⁴ salvation, the purchase of eternal life was completely made, so that there was no need of anything more to be done in order to it... 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage' (Matt. 22:4). Therefore, are your sins many and great? Here is enough done by Christ to procure their pardon. There is no need of any righteousness of yours to obtain your pardon and justification. No! You may come freely, without money and without price. Since therefore there is such a free and gracious invitation given you, come, come naked as you are; come as a poor condemned criminal; come and cast yourself down at Christ's feet, as one justly condemned, and utterly helpless. Here is a complete salvation wrought out by Christ, and through him offered to you. Come, therefore, accept it, and be saved.

2. For Christ to reject one that thus comes to him, would be to frustrate all those great things which God brought to pass from the fall of man to the incarnation of Christ. It would also frustrate all that Christ did and suffered while on earth; indeed, it would frustrate the incarnation itself. All the great things done were for that end, that those might be saved who should come to Christ. Therefore you may be sure Christ will not be backward in saving those who come to him, and trust in him; for he has no desire to frustrate himself in his own work. Neither will God the Father refuse you; for he has no desire to frustrate himself in all that he did for so many hundreds and thousands of years, to prepare the way for the salvation of sinners by Christ. Come, therefore, hearken to the sweet and earnest calls of Christ to your soul. Do as he invites and as he commands you: 'Come unto me, all you that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matt. 11:28-30).³⁶⁵

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I can only say, reader, after writing this – and I hope you can echo the same after reading it – let there be no more foolish talk to the effect that those who hold to particular redemption cannot preach

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the free offer to sinners. More, I appeal to all who hold – or are held by – the doctrines of grace: Let us make sure we address sinners as they ought to be addressed.

Ashbel Green summarised it thus:

Gospel preaching... that is, the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to save even the chief of sinners, and his readiness to receive them, when they come to him in the exercise of faith and a contrite spirit – his readiness to cleanse them in his atoning blood, to clothe them with his perfect righteousness, to justify them freely, to sanctify them by his Spirit, to adopt them into his family, and to crown them with eternal glory, should be set forth in the most clear and persuasive manner. The true nature of regeneration, of evangelical faith, genuine repentance, and new obedience should be carefully explained and illustrated. The danger of grieving away the Spirit of grace, by those with whom he is striving, and the danger of all delay in accepting the gospel offer, should be often brought into view. The peril to the unawakened and the careless... should often be pressed home on those who remain at ease in their sins.³⁶⁶

And may God bless all such preaching!