



Lake Wales
Church of Christ
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33898
www.lakewalescoc.com
(863) 676-4114

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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”
—Proverbs 18:10

Five Things Often Overlooked in Preaching

It may be that we have softened the gospel too much, uncomfortable with asking people to count the cost of real devotion to Christ.

No-Cost Christianity

We often preach Christ without His cross. This is no-cost Christianity.

This is a faith which sighs lovingly at the manger, but is not challenged by Calvary. A faith which never goes deeper than the pleasant emotional flutter many feel toward teddy bears and porcelain figurines. A faith which requires no diligence and asks no sacrifices.

Paul did not disguise the shocking sacrifice of Jesus. Instead, he made it the centerpiece of his preaching, saying, “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). A full disclosure of the way of Christ will faithfully express the warnings that Jesus Himself made, that “you will be hated by all on account of My name” (Matt. 10:22) and “he who

does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:38). Jesus gave all, and a follower of Jesus will give all. True Christianity is going to cost something, require something, demand something—actually, everything—and preaching which does not solemnly reveal this truth is trying to soften the truth.

No-Change Christianity

We often preach salvation without sanctification. This is no-change Christianity.

Conversion to Christ will always require repentance. John the Baptist said, “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). At the first preaching of the gospel, when the audience was “pierced to the heart” and asked “what shall we do?” Peter said, “repent, and let each of you be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Paul characterized his preaching as “solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God” (Acts 20:21). Repentance is defined as a change of mind, heart, and will, which can be seen in a change of behavior. It is a u-turn away from the ways of the world toward the ways of God. Repentance is a requirement for salvation. Acts 17:30–31 says, “Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness...”

The word of God plainly states,

The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

This you know with certainty, that nor immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:5–6).

Thus, our preaching must include a call to repentance, and help disciples make the conscientious effort to stop behaving like the crowd, and start being different, cleansed, holy. We must “pursue ... sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

No-commitment Christianity

We often preach decision without discipleship. This is no-commitment Christianity.

While it is very important to place emphasis on becoming a Christian, and the moment of salvation at baptism (Rom. 6:3–6; 1 Pet. 3:21), it is also important to teach that Christianity is a lifelong commitment. Baptism is not an end, but rather a beginning. A new convert should be the object of special attention by the church, as we strive to build his faith and increase his knowledge of God’s word. The great commission is not just to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them” but also “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Peter says in 1 Pet. 2:2–3, “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

We should, at every step of the way, remind each other that we are in this race to win it (Heb. 12:1–2), and cannot stop until the end (Rev. 12:10). In fact, if we consider ourselves saved just because of that initial spasm of faith, that good confession, some years or decades in our past, we are using a different standard of measure than God uses.

Supplying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification

from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you (2 Peter 1:5–11).

No-compliance Christianity

We often preach love without the Lord. This is no-compliance Christianity.

While God is love (1 John 4:8) He is also the Almighty One. “Obedience” is not a bad word. There will be times when “you may not do the things that you please” (Gal. 5:17), and other times when you must do the things that you don’t want to do (Jam. 4:17). Does a father allow his son to take out the trash when the mood strikes him? No way! A faithful Christian does not wait until he feels like complying, but complies because he respects and fears His Creator and Judge.

No-cause Christianity

We often preach prosperity without purpose. This is no-cause Christianity.

We point fingers of shame at the billionaire prosperity preachers, such as Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyers—as well we should (they are false). But it may be simply because we feel the relative safety of being thousandaires, because we feel justified ridiculing their new Mercedes from the slightly-less luxurious pleather seats of our new Chevys.

To the extent God grants us an abundance of anything, it is so that we may bless others (Acts 4:32, Rom. 12:8, 1 Tim. 6:18–19). We must learn the secret of contentment (Phil. 4:11–12) and make the kingdom of God more of a priority than our workplace or our bottom line. It may be that the most challenging words ever to come out of Jesus’ mouth were those recorded in Luke 14:33: “no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”

—*John Guzzetta, adapted from an outline by Steve Murrell*