
Practical Theology

Seeking Holiness through the Word

The Word of God is central to the development of holiness in the Christian. John Calvin, the French Reformer, explained it in our relationship with Christ.

True religion is a conversation between God and man. The part of the conversation that God initiates is revelation (in his Word). In this, God comes down to meet us, addresses us and makes himself known to us in the preaching of the Word.

The other part of the conversation is man's response to God's revelation. This response, which includes trust, adoration, and godly fear, is what Calvin calls *pietas* (devotion). The preaching of the Word saves us and preserves us as the Spirit enables us to receive the blood of Christ and respond to him in love. By the preaching of men,

Calvin says, "the renewal of the saints is accomplished, and the body of Christ is edified."

The preaching of the Word is our spiritual food and our medicine for spiritual health, Calvin says. With the Spirit's blessing, ministers are spiritual physicians who apply the Word to our souls as earthly physicians apply medicine to our bodies. With the Word these spiritual doctors diagnose, prescribe for, and cure spiritual diseases in those plagued by sin and death.

The preached Word is used as an instrument to heal, cleanse, and make fruitful our diseased souls. The Spirit, or the "internal minister," promotes holiness by using the "external minister" to preach the Word. The Holy Spirit not only uses the gospel to work faith in the souls, but he also uses the law (the 10 Commandments).

The law promotes holiness in three ways:

1. It restrains sin and promotes righteousness.
2. It disciplines, educates, convicts, and drives us outside of ourselves to Jesus Christ.
3. It becomes the rule of life for the believer.

Joel R. Beeke is a minister of the Heritage Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA), and President of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, where he is also the professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics. He is the author of many books and articles.