

## *Conclusion*

In writing this book, my concern has been over the way we address the unconverted at the point of conversion. At first glance – or first hearing – Keller’s approach might appear biblical, but although he uses major biblical terms, he redefines several of them. I have not been arguing with him over semantics; vital principles are at stake. As a result, I am convinced his system radically differs in certain key respects from the biblical way of addressing sinners; in particular, over the question of regeneration, both in principle and actually at the most sensitive point when preaching the gospel. The catastrophe is that this can lead to sinners thinking they have been saved when they have not.

Having argued my case in the preceding pages, I will close by following Spurgeon’s advice:

If you see that a stick is crooked, and you want people to see how crooked it is, lay a straight rod down beside it; that will be quite enough.<sup>1</sup>

Using Keller’s terminology:

The fact that many today are preoccupied with identity, searching for a way to give them a sense of self-esteem, gives us a golden opportunity to catch the attention of the unconverted.

But, having caught their attention by addressing them about their identity – their longing for self-esteem – we must confront this concern, ‘take it on’, and destroy it.<sup>2</sup>

We are to do this by making it clear to the unconverted that their preoccupation with identity – in the sense of self-esteem – is utterly misguided. Far worse, it is wrong, it is

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<sup>1</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: ‘The Minister’s Ordinary Conversation’, *Lectures to My Students*, Vol.1.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Confront*.

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sinful. It is not that they are seeking their self-esteem in a mistaken way, but the fact that they are taken up with it in the first place. Natural it may be to be consumed with self-esteem, commonplace it may be, but, nevertheless, it is sinful.

We must seek to persuade the unconverted to drop their preoccupation with how they see themselves, and start thinking about how God sees them. This is the identity that matters.

We must tell the unconverted that by nature in God's sight they are accounted sinful, they commit sins, and are in desperate straits, utterly helpless and ruined, condemned under his wrath.

We must go on to proclaim the only remedy for their plight – regeneration by the Spirit, leading to their repentance from sin, and faith in Christ.

And we must leave no room for doubt in all three:

Regeneration is a sovereign act of God's Spirit, a miraculous demonstration of his power, grace and mercy. Without it, no sinner will ever be able to see, let alone enter, the kingdom, but will live and die in sin under the wrath of God. Biblical terms and concepts such as 'imputation', 'atonement' and 'propitiation' must be used and fully explained.

Sin is putting self in the place of God. This chiefly manifests itself in the unregenerate sinner's refusal to trust and submit to, and obey Christ in the gospel.

And faith is not merely mental assent; it is trust in, reliance upon, the person and work of Christ and Christ alone for salvation.

And what is it to be saved? It is not deliverance from seeking self-esteem in the wrong way, replacing the useless object (whatever it is) which is being pursued, replacing it by Christ, but it is what the Bible means by 'justification' – this biblical term needing to be fully explained to the sinner.

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Finally, we must urge, beg, plead with, entreat, and seek to persuade the unconverted to obey the gospel, receive and welcome the invitation, command, call and offer of Christ and salvation at once, warning them of their danger if they refuse or even delay.

That's how I see the straight stick.

And that explains my choice of an extract from John Murray as one of the epigraphs of this work:

Far too frequently the conception entertained of conversion is so superficial and beggarly that it completely fails to take account of the momentous change of which conversion is the fruit. And the whole notion of what is involved in the application of redemption becomes so attenuated that it has little or no resemblance to that which the gospel teaches. Regeneration is at the basis of all change in heart and life. It is a stupendous change because it is God's re-creative act. A cheap and tawdry evangelism has tended to rob the gospel which it proclaims of that invincible power which is the glory of the gospel of sovereign grace.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Murray: *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.