

# ACT LIKE JESUS

pursuing biblical **morality** without falling into unbiblical **moralism**



# THE NEED OF APPLICATION



## The Need of Application

# The Goal of Discipleship: Doing

- **Teaching** our kids the Bible **without** providing **application** is merely **talking** about the Bible
- People were **made to act**
  - Key **Scriptures** and helpful **quotes**



God blessed them and said to them,  
“**Be fruitful** and **multiply**! **Fill** the earth  
and **subdue** it! **Rule** over the fish of the  
sea and the birds of the air and every  
creature that moves on the ground.”

Genesis 1:28, NET

For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus **for good works** that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.

Ephesians 2:10, NET

"If you love me, you will **obey** my  
commandments."

John 14:15, NET

So also faith, if it does not have **works**,  
is dead being by itself.

James 2:17, NET

“**Agreeing** with Christian ideas and goals does not make one a Christian; it makes one merely an **admirer of Christianity**.”

Klyne Snodgrass

“A disciple is one who seeks to **speak**,  
**act**, and **live in ways** that *bear witness*  
*to the truth, goodness, and beauty of*  
*Jesus Christ.*”

Kevin Vanhoozer

## The Need of Application

# The Goal of Instruction: Doing

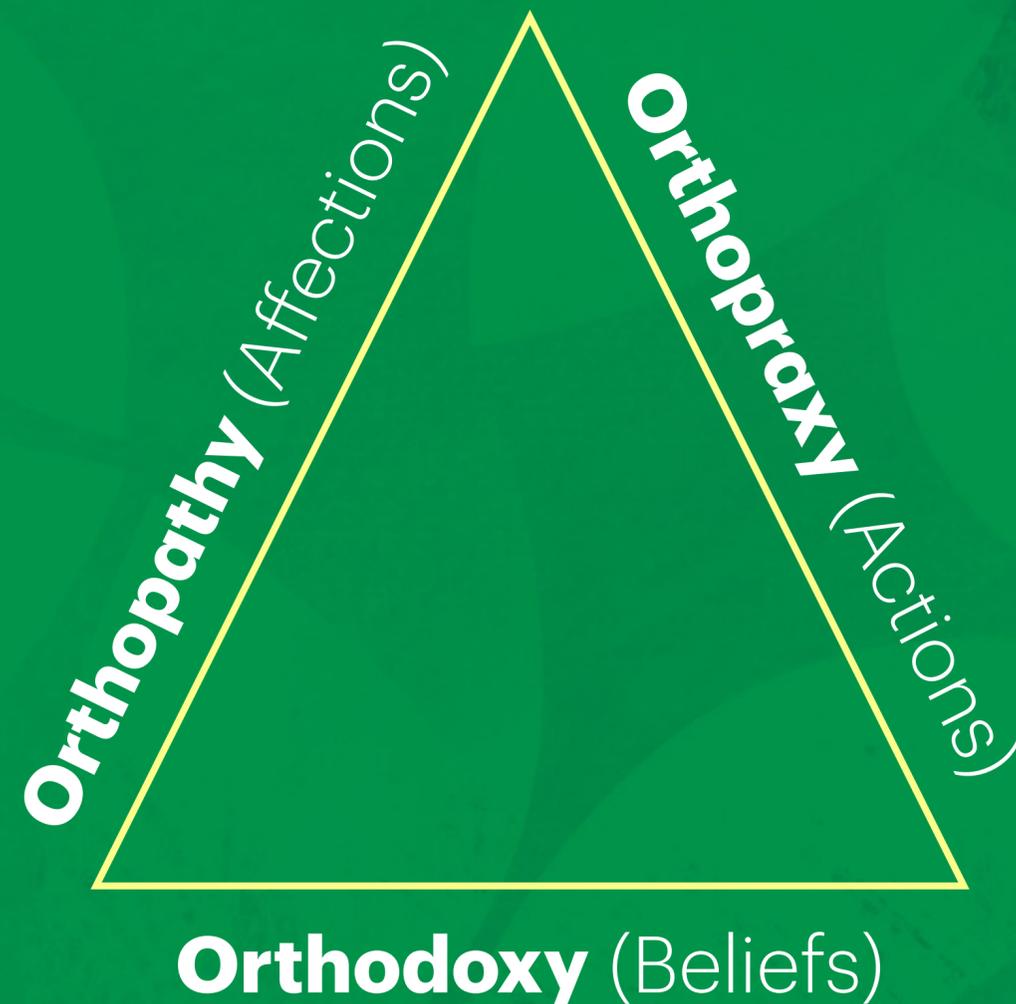
- Perhaps we'd do better to read and teach the Bible as a **drama** rather than as a **story**
  - Stories are **read** and **enjoyed**
  - Dramas are **read** and **performed**



The Need of Application

# The Goal of Instruction: Doing

- This ensures we cover all **three critical legs** of discipleship





# THE TENDENCY TOWARD MORALISM



# The Tendency Toward Moralism

## The Dilemma

- The Bible's "Thou Shalt"s and the "Thou Shalt Not"s set a **context** of **favor/disfavor**
  - To **obey** is to be **good** and to be in a state of **favor**
  - To **disobey** is to be **bad** and to be in a state of **disfavor**
- Our **culture strengthens** this thinking
  - e.g., good kids **obey at school**, **Santa** rewards good kids
- The result is often intentional or unintentional **moralism**



# The Tendency Toward Moralism

## The Definition

- Moralism is believing that your **standing before God** and your **relationship with him** depend on following a rigid set of **moral rules** and thus **being good enough**
  - “If I’m good, God is pleased with me and I’m rewarded, or at least I stay out of trouble”
  - “If I’m bad, God is displeased with me and I’m punished, or at least I miss out on reward”
- Moralism is a **cruel master** that is **never pleased**
- It constantly **whispers** and **shouts**: “Do better!” “Try harder!” “Be good!”

# The Tendency Toward Moralism

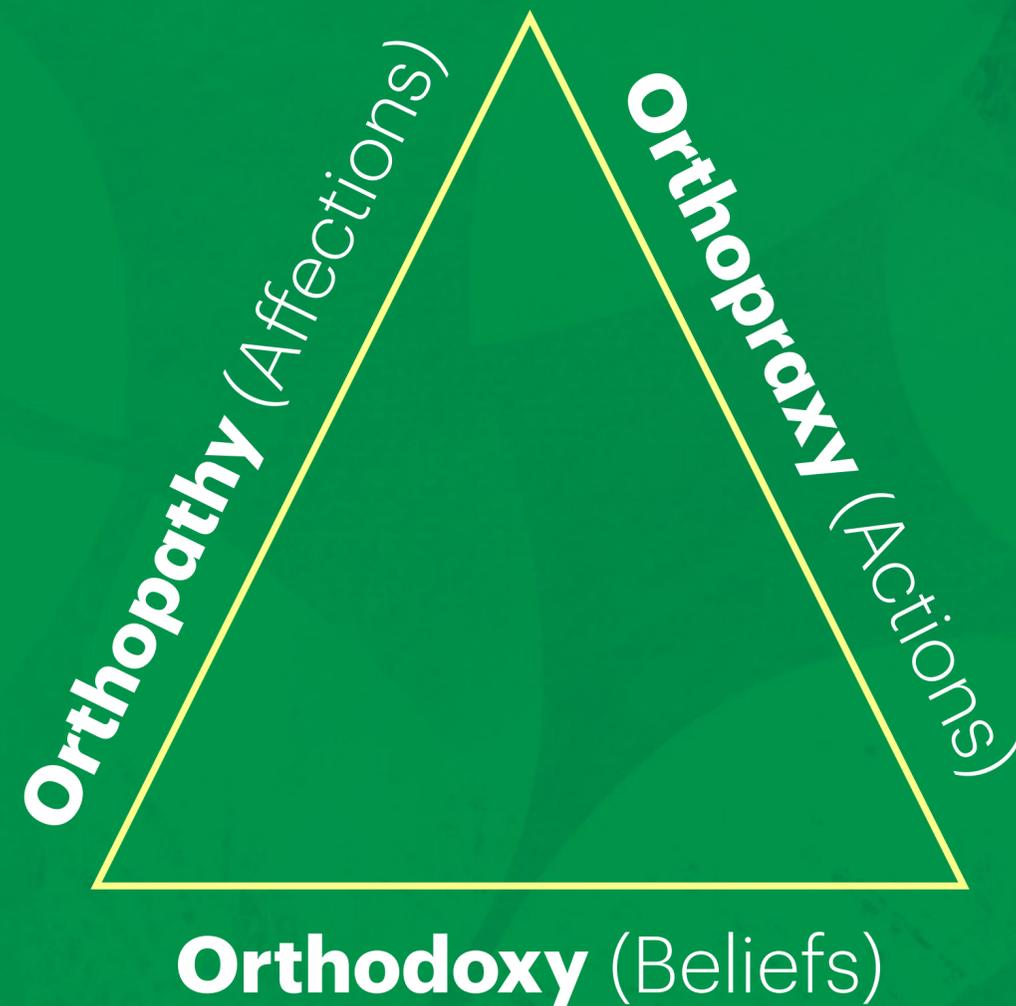
## The Danger

- The problem with this approach **isn't that its wrong to want children to behave** in certain ways (again, we were made to act)
- Nor is the problem generally that the **behaviors categorized as correct are incorrect**, or vice versa
  - Moralism can produce children who act the right way
- Rather, the problem is that the right actions **without the right purpose** and **the right heart** isn't enough (**orthopraxy** requires **orthodoxy** and **orthopathy**)

The Need of Application

# The Danger

- Remember, all **three legs of discipleship critical legs**



# The Tendency Toward Moralism

## The Danger

- Furthermore, moralism finds it **difficult to correctly apply** much of the Bible
  - It's doesn't just focus on the **wrong purpose** and **miss the heart**
  - The actions can end up **falling short** of what's intended
- For example, how do we connect the account of **Samson** to our kids' daily living beyond concluding with **"don't be like Samson"**?
  - But discipleship isn't about making **anti-Samsons** out of children
  - Nor is discipleship about producing well-behaved but heartless **modern-day Pharisees**

# THE CORRECTION TOWARD THE GOSPEL



## The Correction Toward the Gospel

# The Gospel-Centered Movement

- Early **2000s**
- Rise in gospel-centered **teaching**
  - e.g., Piper, Keller, Chandler
- Rise in gospel-centered **conferences** and **organizations**
  - e.g., Together for the Gospel (2006), The Gospel Coalition (2007)
- Rise in gospel-centered **resources**
  - e.g., The Gospel Project (2012)

## The Correction Toward the Gospel

# The Gospel-Centered Movement

- Sought to **restore Jesus** and the **gospel** at the **core** of preaching and teaching
  - **Test:** If you can preach a sermon or teach a lesson in a **public school** or **Jewish synagogue**, you aren't preaching or teaching the gospel
  - There's no such thing as a **Jesusless sermon** or **lesson**
- This introduced or reintroduced the **Christocentric approach** to interpretation



## The Correction Toward the Gospel

# The Christocentric Approach

- Each **Old Testament passage** connects to Christ primarily through **his redemptive work**
  - Jesus is in the Old Testament in the **messianic prophecies**, of course
  - And Jesus is in the Old Testament in the **historical narrative**, of course
  - But Jesus is also in the Old Testament by way of **typology, imagery,** and **foreshadowing**
  - Jesus is also in the Old Testament in general terms by recognizing the **major themes of redemption** revealed in Old Testament accounts

## The Correction Toward the Gospel

# Christocentric Example: Genesis 22

- God's calling Abraham to **sacrifice Isaac** foreshadows the cross
  - A father offering up his **one and only beloved son**
  - The son **carrying the wood** up the mountain
  - The **mountain** was likely where the temple was later built
  - The last-minute **substitute of a ram**
- To **teach Genesis 22**, is to **teach the cross**



# GOING FURTHER TOWARD MORALITY



## Going Further Toward Morality

# Christocentric Interpretation Concerns

- Christocentric interpretation has **ensured teachings include Jesus and the gospel**
- Christocentric interpretation has also **safeguarded against moralism**
- However, sometimes it makes it hard to **get to application** beyond “respond to the gospel” or “be amazed by the gospel”
  - We cannot neglect **biblical morality** out of fear of **unbiblical moralism**

## Going Further Toward Morality

# The Need of Gospel-Centered Morality

- **Gospel-centered morality** is **living the way God made us to live** from **our identity as image bearers made new in Christ** in the **power of the Holy Spirit**
  - Moralism: Doing to **earn a position** of acceptance from God
    - Morality: Doing **from a position** of acceptance by God
  - Moralism: Doing from **our own power**
    - Morality: Doing from **God's power**
  - Moralism: Doing for **our own glory**
    - Morality: Doing for **God's glory**

Going Further Toward Morality

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# The Need of Gospel-Centered Morality

- Key **Scripture** and helpful **quotes**



Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **For** I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Matthew 25:34–36, NET

“Grace is not opposed to **effort**; it is opposed to **earning**.”

Dallas Willard

“Religion and morality are **never divorced.**”

Hermon Bavinck

# IDENTITY: THE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY



Identity: The Foundation of Morality

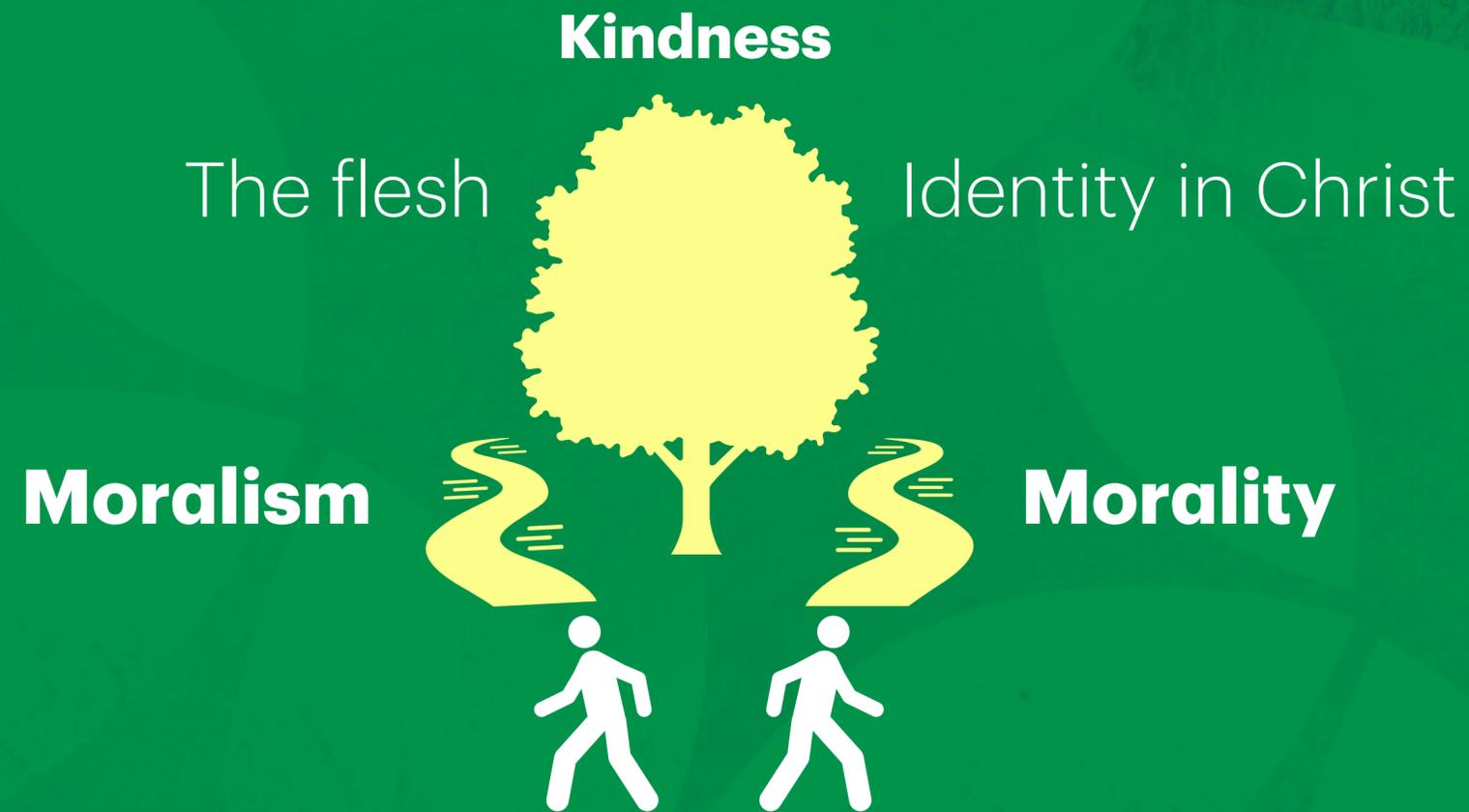
# Pursuing Morality While Avoiding Moralism

- The **actions** of moralism and morality often look the same
- So, how do we **pursue morality** while **avoiding moralism**?
- The key is **identity in Christ**



Identity: The Foundation of Morality

# Pursuing Morality While Avoiding Moralism



# IMITATING JESUS: THE PRACTICE OF MORALITY



## Imitating Jesus: The Practice of Morality

# Restoring the Image of God

- The **goal of discipleship** is to help our kids **imitate Jesus** as **image bearers** in how they live **each day**
  - This assumes a **conversion** experience, of course

Evangelism → Conversion → Discipleship (Imitation)

- Helpful **quotes**



“When faith is understood as **identity in Christ**, then works are not separable actions but the necessary living out of that identity...doing demonstrates identity.”

Klyne Snodgrass

We are to live with “**a reverse Midas touch**, as it were: the ability to turn the gold of the gospel into the workaday stuff of ordinary life.”

Kevin Vanhoozer

## Imitating Jesus: The Practice of Morality

# Imitation Is Commanded (OT)

- God's people are to be **holy** because He is holy (see Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8)
- When Moses warned the Israelites of false prophets, he called on the people to "**follow** the Lord" (Deut. 13:4)
- Elijah would call on the people to stop wavering between Baal and God and "**follow**" one or the other (1 Kin. 18:21)



# Imitating Jesus: The Practice of Morality

## Imitation Is Commanded (OT)

- **Genesis 1–2** paints a vivid picture of God’s design for people to imitate Him
  - As God **rules**, Adam rules (Gen. 1:28)
  - As God **works**, Adam works (Gen. 1:28)
  - As God **names**, Adam names (Gen. 2:19-20, 23)
  - As God **approves**, Adam approves (Gen. 2:23)
  - As God **rests**, Adam rests (Gen. 2:2-3)



## Imitating Jesus: The Practice of Morality

# Imitation Is Commanded (NT)

- Christians are to **love** and **pray** for their **enemies** to be like the Father (Matt. 5:44–45)
- Christians are to be **perfect** as the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48), **merciful** like the Father is merciful (Luke 6:36), **holy** like the Father is holy (1 Pet 1:15–16), and **forgiving** like the Father is forgiving (Eph. 4:32)
- Christians are to **suffer** like Christ suffered (1 Pet. 2:21)



...because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Romans 8:29, NET

For I have given you an example—you  
should **do just as I have done** for you.

John 13:15, NET

Therefore, **be imitators of God** as  
dearly loved children and live in love,  
**just as Christ** also loved us and gave  
himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant  
offering to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2, NET

**Be imitators** of me, just as I also am of  
Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1, NET

# THE CHRISTICONIC APPROACH



"Scripture is more than just a witness to the fulfillment of messianic promises, there are **ethical demands** therein as well that must be brought to bear upon the lives of God's people."

Abraham Kuruvilla

## The Christiconic Approach

# Seeing the 3 Worlds of the Text

- The **World of the Text**
  - The basic language and grammar of the text
- The **World Behind the Text**
  - The historical context of the text
- The **World in Front of the Text**
  - The author's point of the text



## The Christiconic Approach

# Seeing the 3 Worlds of the Text

- Example: **“The door is open”**
  - The door is open, so come in
  - The door is open, so leave through it
  - The door is open, so close it
- This thinking is the **foundation** of the **Christiconic approach**



# The Christiconic Approach

## Definition

- The Old Testament is **not only about what God would do through Christ**
- The Old Testament is also about **how God expected his people to live** before Christ came, and in many ways, how God's people are to live even after he came
- The Old Testament provides God's instruction for his people to **fulfill his divine demand in their lives** by imitating him based on his **character traits revealed** in Scripture



# The Christiconic Approach

## Definition

- Every **passage** presents a **different facet of the divine demand**, which can be defined as “**God’s gracious invitation to mankind to live in his ideal world by abiding by the thrust of that pericope.**” (Abraham Kuruville)
  - Because **only Jesus fulfilled all of God’s divine demands**, each passage, then, ultimately **portrays a different aspect of Christ** (by way of positive or negative example)
- As our kids obey the **individual demands of each pericope**, they grow to **be more like Christ**

## The Christiconic Approach

# Christiconic Example: Genesis 22

- The key to this passage might be **Abraham's devotion to God** evidenced by his **radical obedience**
  - We find a clue for this in Genesis 22:2, where "**love**" is used for the first time in Scripture, referencing Abraham's love for Isaac.
  - The test for Abraham, therefore, was to see **whom he loved more**: Isaac or God?
- The world in front of the text, then, points us toward **obeying from love for God**

## Christocentric + Christiconic

# Why Not Both?

- The **goal** of discipleship is **seeing Jesus** and reaching **correct application**
- Using both the **Christocentric and Christiconic** approaches safeguards that this is done properly
- We study the passage as a **historical account**
- We then seek to understand the **world in front of the text** in two ways:
  - We look for **prophecies, images, types**, etc. of the work Jesus would do
  - We also look for examples and counterexamples of the **character of Jesus**

“Right interpretation results in performance. What counts is not knowing about texts but knowing texts well enough **to do them**—that is, knowing texts experientially and with your whole being, not knowing about God, but living with God in such a way as to reflect God’s character.”

Klyne Snodgrass

# MORALITY AND THE UNSAVED



## Morality and the Unsaved

# 3 Keys to Applying Scripture to the Unsaved

- **(1)** Applying Scripture to an unsaved child **doesn't necessitate moralism**
  - Remember, moralism and morality often have the **same action**
  - The **path** how we get to each is how they differ
- Remember also that **all image bearers are capable of doing some good**, and all are **responsible** to do some good
  - e.g., God expects all humanity **not to murder**
  - e.g., all children are commanded to **obey their parents**

## Morality and the Unsaved

# 3 Keys to Applying Scripture to the Unsaved

- **(2)** Performance **aids understanding** the gospel
  - To **intellectually** understand turning the other cheek is far from **experientially** understanding it
  - To practice love, forgiveness, kindness, mercy, etc. helps increase an understanding of these aspects and **brings the gospel into sharper focus**



## Morality and the Unsaved

# 3 Keys to Applying Scripture to the Unsaved

- **(3)** Performance is **preparatory** for the gospel
  - To practice love, forgiveness, kindness, mercy, etc. affirms the difficult and goodness of each, **magnifying the beauty and the power of the gospel**
  - A pre-believer who has experienced and who understands forgiveness is likely **more able to comprehend and respond to God's forgiveness**



