

Redeemer's Philosophy of Ministry: The Yes, But No, But Yes"

Redeemer has a style of ministry that we stole from Dr. Tim Keller. We think that Keller stole it from Paul who stole it from Jesus. This ministry style is something Keller called the 'yes but no, but yes'. We want to define this ministry style, give some examples of it, and then look at why religious people have a tendency to miss it.

Simply put, the 'yes but no but yes' is a way of finding common ground so that we can find higher ground. The first yes is trying to create a safe place to listen from where conversation can occur. The no is where we begin to discuss the potential pitfalls of what we are talking about, and the second yes is where we speak the good news (the gospel). There is an old saying "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar". Vinegar would be starting with the no, but honey is starting with that first yes.

For example, if you catch someone in the act of the heinous sin of adultery (something that will destroy everyone who is involved), the last thing the person wants to hear is "you are a sinner and you are guilty and you are...". Although it is true, this only creates defensiveness and breaks down the ability to communicate before the conversation begins. That would be starting with the no – with vinegar.

The heart of Redeemer (and the heart of Jesus) is to start with the yes. What if we started with, "Hey, I know you're having an affair, and can I just tell you that I love the fact that you are aware of the God given needs of your heart, and that you are seeking to figure out how to meet those needs. I'm sorry that those needs have not been met in the past...I'd love to help work that through with you". That's the first yes. After establishing a common ground, we can then move to the, 'but no' and talk about the ways in which having a sexual relationship outside of marriage destroys everyone involved – even the person having the affair. The second 'yes' is an invitation to talk about the gospel, and how Jesus' death, burial and resurrection pays for our sins (a huge price that upholds the Holiness of God), makes us right with God, meaning that the deepest needs of our hearts are now met in him, and we can now 'go and sin no more' because the needs we were trying to meet in the first place are not met in an overwhelming way.

Jesus uses this style of ministry when he visits Zacchaeus. He doesn't tell Zacchaeus "hey I'm coming to your house for dinner but before I step inside, can we just be clear that I don't condone your way of life". Jesus goes to his house (that's the first yes), he has a conversation with him (the but no, but yes), and Zacchaeus comes out a changed man.

Daniel uses this style of ministry in the king's palace when he asks the Kings servant if he can have a different diet than what is prescribed. Yes, we want to serve the king. No, the way we are doing it will not work for any of us, but yes, God wants me to be a blessing to your kingdom and to see God's kingdom come here...can we try this and see what happens? He wins the kings favor and an ability to show God's love to all the land.

Paul uses this style of ministry at Mars Hills when he walks past an altar in the city with a sign that says, "to an unknown God". Rather than just saying "you guys are all idiots", he says "I see that you are very religious in all respects" and with that common ground he is given the opportunity to present the gospel. Paul not only gets to the 'but no but yes', but is invited back for further discussion. What a win for the kingdom!

While this style of ministry has been helpful for talking to Christians and to people who are not believers in Jesus, there are also examples in scripture of how religious people miss this style of ministry and walk away before the miracle occurs.

In John 8, the religious leaders bring an adulterous woman before Jesus for a specific purpose: they wanted to see if Jesus would uphold the law of Moses. Was Jesus going to hold her accountable for this sin? Would he tell her to stop? That's a great question...was Jesus going to redefine sin or somehow dismiss it? If he does, can God still be Holy?

Jesus' response to the religious leaders was to write something in the sand (we don't know what – some have speculated a list of the religious leaders' sins) and then said, "you who are without sin, throw the first stone [to kill her]".

To the average bystander, they would probably have thought that Jesus just let this one slide. In many ways it looks like he is just comparing her sin to theirs, and when they walk away realizing their sin, it's like Jesus was saying "we all struggle, don't worry about it – you know how those religious people are so stingy – what a bunch of hypocrites". The crowd might also have thought that Jesus didn't do anything to discourage her from future sin. Was Jesus just a progressive (redefining sin)? Was he not following an orthodox view of Christianity or sin? Was he part of the emerging church? Was he degrading God's holiness?

The religious leaders had walked away, but Jesus is still on his first yes – he was still finding common ground with this woman who with everything in her life is just trying to forge out a feeling of acceptance and love. The miracle was yet to occur!

Knowing the rest of the story, we know that Jesus didn't let her off the hook for that sin, but rather paid for it himself. He did not dumb down the Holiness of God, nor did he change the standard to grading on the curve. The condemnation that was upon her, the required punishment - the stoning to death, he took that by laying down his life on the cross. Jesus didn't let it slide but paid dearly for what she had done.

Jesus also did another powerful work that day – he enabled her to 'go and sin no more'. That day, the way in which he showed her unconditional love taught her she no longer needed to pursue love in the idolatrous way in which she had been seeking it. There was no greater way to put her fleshly desires to death than to see God's love. His command to 'go and sin no more' was actually viable.

The adulterous woman got the 'yes but no but yes' and her life was changed forever. The religious leaders left after the first yes, continued to live in bitter judgement, but the saddest part of all was they missed the miracle of rebirth. They remained in their sin; the woman was eternally freed from hers.

No doubt, many of us who have had privilege of growing up in churches have a keen eye on sin and are able to call it out. But, if we, like the religious leaders in John 8 do not understand Jesus' philosophy of ministry, we too might leave after the first yes and miss the miracle of rebirth.

As Christians, God has called us to be smarter – to not just respond, but to think through our responses. We want to be "In the City for the City", engaging with culture and common issues to see God's kingdom come. We can find common ground by saying things like "Black lives do matter" (the first yes) and then after establishing trust (something that might take years), say "but let's talk about the way that the movement is ironically trying to stop oppression by creating other sorts of oppression" (the but no), and in this discussion win the opportunity to say "but the good news is Jesus came to set the captives [the oppressed] free" (the but yes).

For those who misunderstand our philosophy of ministry, you may end up leaving after the first yes, before the true miracle happens. For those who have felt condemned by the church because the conversation started with the 'no', we want to apologize, not because our view of sin has shifted, but because the way that we have brought it up has not been helpful to you hearing the good news that we build our lives on.

The ultimate 'yes but no but yes' is Jesus. In coming to earth as incarnate God – as man, he didn't start with the no, but rather "yes I want to know your needs, your struggle and your pain exactly the way you do". He doesn't stop there, but rather he says "but no, the way you are fulfilling those needs is actually killing you – religion and worldliness won't work". Then he says "but good news...there is a third way – the salvation I am providing for you". He then becomes the ultimate yes for us, paying for sin (keep the standard), reconciling us to God, and showing us love in a way that we can never forget.

Praise God for the yes, but no but yes.

Teaching Notes: (If you want to use this teaching, sharing it with others, these notes might help).

Redeemer has a philosophy of ministry called the “yes but no but yes”.

- A ministry style that was introduced to us by Tim Keller, but Keller stole it from Jesus and Paul.

Three ideas we want to explore:

1. “The yes, but no, but yes” defined.
2. Examples.
3. The danger of the yes, but no, but yes in a religious culture.

1. The yes but no but yes explored.

- a. Simply put –
 - i. Yes – find common ground.
 - ii. No – explain why and what is broken.
 - iii. Yes – how the gospel brings true hope.
- b. A example – Adultery
 - i. Yes – looking for love (God given need!)
 - ii. No – brokenness (the cheater, and the cheated on)
 - iii. Yes – the gospel (it is sin – Jesus paid for sin - here’s the love of God for you)
- c. The difference between starting with the yes, and starting with the no

2. Examples.

- a. Zacchaeus (Jesus)
- b. Paul at Mars Hill
- c. Daniel

3. How the religious people missed out...

- a. In John 8, we have a classic example of the yes but no but yes, and how the religious missed it.
- b. Share the story
- c. Think about when the religious teachers left (after the first yes)
 - i. Because they left after the first yes, they thought Jesus unholy – changing God’s standard.
- d. Think about what Jesus did after the religious leaders left (the but no, but yes)
 - i. Jesus died for her sin (he kept the standard)
 - ii. Jesus loved her in such a way that she could ‘go and sin no more’.
- e. Religious missed – THEY LEFT BEFORE THE “NO BUT YES” – They missed the miracle.

Redeemer – a commitment to the yes, but no but yes.

- The joy of seeing people in our community hear the gospel by finding common ground. (believers and unbelievers alike)
- The danger if we stop listening (Black Lives Matter Example)

The most beautiful “Yes but no but yes”

- **Metanarrative of scripture: Creation (yes), Fall (but no), Redemption and Restoration (but YES!)**
- **Jesus – yes (life incarnate), no (sinful man), yes (hope in God alone).**

