

Everything Focused On Christ

How do we live?

The Lord Jesus, while walking on our earth, was our example to follow in everything. How did he live? He did everything according to his Father's word. Jesus only ever did what his Father did and said the words given him by his Father.¹ It was a life of utter dependency, which was why his ministry only began when the Spirit came upon him at baptism. Despite being equal with God,² Jesus submitted himself in the Father's plan to achieve salvation for the elect, but also to model a righteous life under God.

What is the key to righteous living? It is dependency; an utter reliance upon God; waiting for him to act and following him in every move.

How did the disciples get trained? They followed Christ. They left everything behind and wandered deserts, mountains, lakes, villages and towns doing what Jesus said to do, saying what Jesus told them to say. In doing this they gradually became apostles, but only after being filled with the Spirit.

So what about us?

First, it is clear that we also need to be filled with the Spirit.³ That is, we must be living born-again lives, consecrated wholly to God and living in the full benefits of being given to the Holy Spirit; not grieving him, not resisting him, but being daily filled with him so that we may bear the fruits of the Spirit, which is the life of Christ, whom the Spirit glorifies.⁴

Then, we must absolutely focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ in everything we do. We must follow him, we must do what he says to do, we must speak as he shows us. By being filled with His Spirit, we can ensure that we are receiving the things of Christ; but we must then make certain that we are focused on nothing other than the Lord himself. In everything in our lives, Christ must be the centre. Jesus only.

A vital law

This is the most important principle of practical theology, the most vital matter that we ever determine in our lives. Christ must be the focus of everything.

When Christ is centre in absolutely any matter, there is a spiritual flow of life. When we are engaged in something that is supposed to be Christian, but Christ is not the centre in actuality, there is no life; it is a dead work.⁵

Every subject that we care to look at finds its centre and completion in Christ, he is all and in all.⁶ So, how do we deal with any issue - find its centre in Christ and all will become clear.

Let's look at some issues.

¹ Jn 5:19, 8:28-29.

² Col 2:9.

³ Eph 5:18.

⁴ Jn 16:14; Eph 4:30; 5:9; Gal 5:22.

⁵ Heb 6:1, 9:14; Rev 3:1.

⁶ Eph 1:23; Col 1:18; 2:10, 3:11.

The kingdom

Arguments continue about the constitution of God's kingdom. Dispensationalists separate what God has joined together, claiming the kingdom of heaven is contrary to the kingdom of God. Other folk separate the church from the kingdom, while yet others say they are exactly the same. What is the problem here? People are looking too intensely at the object and missing its centre in Christ.

What is the kingdom essentially? It is Christ. Christ is the kingdom. He is both the king and the whole kingdom. The subjects of the king are only in the kingdom because they are in Christ. The restored creation is awaiting the revealing of the kingdom because it is found in Christ. He is all and in all.

God is only interested in one thing in this creation, only one thing - that is his beloved Son. He only loves one thing - the Son.⁷ There is nothing in the whole world that God cares about except his Son. Why, because the world is in sin. At the Fall it was ruined, marred and perverted into utter corruption. Its civilisations demonstrate the character of God's enemy, Satan. That is why the world is such a wicked place, full of vile acts that get worse each year. Nature still expresses beauty, glory and majesty, especially in places far away from human civilisation, because the creation of God is so marvellous, it is difficult to corrupt entirely.⁸ Even after many thousands of years of destruction, the world is still amazing, but the natural ecological systems are on the brink of ruin due to man's selfishness and arrogance.

God loves this world he created so much because it is the place where he nurtures the elect. Because he loves this world that births his sons, he sent his only begotten Son from eternity to rescue his elect and redeemed creation. [This is what the cherubim stand for in the presence of God, awaiting the reality at the end.] There is nothing in this world that escapes destruction and wrath, except what is found in Jesus Christ. Only those who are sealed in the blood of the Lamb are not only saved but also loved. God loves us because he loves his Son. God is interested in us because he loves his Son. Everything else is doomed. The natural order of creation will rediscover its place when the earth is restored after divine burning, and finds itself once more in harmony with heaven.⁹

The kingdom is Christ. The kingdom is God's reign. Where does the Father's will rule perfectly? Only in Christ. God reigns only in Christ and nowhere else. Where does God reign over servants in full submission - in Christ? Who are these people? They are Christians who are found in Christ. We are in submission to God, because we are found in Christ. The kingdom is Christ, and by extension, all those found in him.

Is God reigning in the earth? Absolutely, he is Lord over creation. The earth belongs to him in all its fulness. The cattle are his on every hill. Even the birds only stay aloft by his word.¹⁰ But in the secular world God reigns as judge. The world is under sentence of death. In God's eternal eyes, this world is already dead. This world is not his kingdom where he reigns in every heart. This world is doomed. Every non-elect person already has judgment hanging over them.¹¹

⁷ Matt 3:17; Jn 5:20.

⁸ Ps 19:1, 33:5.

⁹ Rm 8:19-22; 2 Pt 3:12-13.

¹⁰ Ps 24:1, 47:2, 50:10, 104:24; Matt 10:29.

¹¹ Jn 3:36.

But those who are in Christ are the expression of God's kingdom as the manifestation of the life of Christ, and not their old nature which belongs to the death of this world. Where do we see the kingdom of God? We see it in every believer who is filled with the Spirit and following the Lord Jesus. Where Jesus is the centre, there is the kingdom.

The ekklesia

Ekklesia is the Biblical (*Koine* Greek) word for 'church', from which we derive *ecclesiastical*. It is a shame we don't use it as it emphasises people; citizens called out to meet together for a purpose. Our word 'church' always conjures up thoughts of buildings and this is hugely unhelpful. It is one step from there to rigid structures, leadership and inactivity, when the Biblical word emphasises the opposite concepts.

Now the Christian church is a mess in the world today. If an alien landed on the earth and wanted to visit a Christian church, where would he go? There are literally thousands of denominations and sects all claiming to be Christian, all having different theologies, practices, structures and even Bibles; while at the same time many of them condemn the others.

Paul told his readers that we should think the same thing or, be of the same mind.¹² In those days the apostles could oversee that churches maintained the same traditions as they were on hand to resolve the many growing problems; but even by the close of the apostolic age the church was fragmenting and being infiltrated by various errors. Since then, disputes have arisen over the interpretation of scripture leading to new churches based on this or that dogma.

What is the cause of all this really? The main reason for this is the dominance of men in leadership, not interpretation. It is a question of focus. The church membership is looking at the wrong thing.

Factions start when people focus on men, even if they think they are following men who preach the truth. In Corinth, Paul had to cope with Christians following Peter, Apollos, himself or even a group claiming to only follow Christ but led by someone who split them off from everyone else.

What is the solution to this problem? Focus on Christ himself alone.

As the leaders are focused on Christ, they will look to nurturing the members as Christ did his disciples. As the congregation looks to Christ, it will seek to honour the elders. As together they both look to Christ and submit all thoughts and decisions to him, they will honour God as a local church. All worldly, fleshly, human, natural factors need to be driven into the dust. We don't need buildings, pews, overhead projectors, pianos, administrators, tape machines or anything else, if we have people focused on Christ and in love with each other, as to Christ. Churches like this can change the world.

Jesus is not only the head of the church,¹³ the church is his body.¹⁴ The ekklesia is Christ. The church belongs to the Father, it is not ours to do what we want with it. He has given clear instructions how we meet, what we do when we meet, how we live together, what our focus is, and what our corporate purpose is. Variations within that basic framework are

¹² Rm 12:16; 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 2:2, 3:16, 4:2.

¹³ Col 1:18

¹⁴ Eph 1:23; Col 1:24.

down to culture, time restrictions, the law and practicalities; but the basic principles remain sure.¹⁵

If we better understood that the body is the Lord, we would be much more careful in how we handled people. The most important thing for leaders to do is care for people. This is why they are called shepherds (pastors); their job is to lead sheep into pasture and keep them safe. The Israeli shepherd at the time of Jesus herded the sheep into pens at night made from whatever was to hand (thorn bushes, stones etc), but there was a gap in the sheepfold to let them in. In this gap the shepherd slept so that any sheep thinking of straying had to climb over the shepherd. This is how pastors need to be committed to people. Why, because these people not only belong to Christ, but they are in Christ. Leaders dare not abuse their flock since these people are in Christ. An attack on a believer is an attack on Christ.

The stories one hears today of the abuses and fleecing of sheep in the church is terrifying. If only these leaders could see that they will one day give an account of every single action towards their sheep.

Divisions can be avoided if we focus on Christ, not upon men or our differences. Most differences can be lived with in a loving, evangelical community. In times of persecution, all sorts of strange bedfellows find that they can have fellowship; the fires of suffering or war bring people together and strip away what is unnecessary. In trial, only Christ counts for anything at all. This is how we should live together. It is also how leaders should lead, as a dying man to dying men.

If believers are truly focused on Christ, truly submitted to his word and truly open to love the brethren, then all sorts of secondary doctrinal differences can be accommodated. However, cardinal doctrinal error, serious practical aberrations, false worship and a false Gospel puts adherents outside of genuine Christian fellowship as this is not focusing upon Christ but upon doctrines of demons.

Conclusion

We could go through many other concepts, but they all amount to the same thing - a focus on Christ. Even theology itself. What is the point of it? To discover more of Christ. To systematically assemble dogma from scripture texts, collate it, analyse it and demonstrate Christ by it. What about studying the Bible or preaching? The point is to discover Christ in what we read. Christ is everywhere in scripture; the Spirit is waiting to reveal to us how to think, how to listen, how to live and how to love as he guides us into the truth of Christ.

Even prayer, what is it? It is talking to God surely, but God only listens to what is in Christ. There are many dead prayers spoken everyday that do not pass the ceiling. Only what is birthed in Christ, mixed with his incense (the fragrance of his crucified life) gets through to heaven. Not only does God hear such prayer, but people listening are built up and can say a hearty, 'Amen'.

Brethren, focus on Christ. Spend you whole life discovering more about him in all you do, in all your reading, in all your fellowship, in all your relationships. Centre on him and all will be well. Stray from him and all will be lost.

¹⁵ Such as: Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Cor 14:12, 26; Eph 4:29; 1 Thess 5:11; 2 Tim 4:2.

In your fellowship with brethren, look to Christ and not the idiosyncrasies of your brother. See him as in Christ. Seek his good as honouring Christ. What an opportunity fellowship is to do good in the name of God. Even helping financially is lending to the Lord¹⁶ and is living a life that especially pleases God; indeed it is described in words that remind us of worship.¹⁷

Focus on the Lord, at all times, in all places, in all endeavours. Let his face be before you in every undertaking. In your relationships make him the centre and the foundation, and not each other or your own gratification.

If Jesus is central in all we do, God will centre us in his purposes.

May the Lord Jesus be glorified in and through us to the praise of God the Father.

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¹⁶ Prov 19:17.

¹⁷ Phil 4:18, I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. Heb 13:15-16, Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.