

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 2:6-7

Living a Christ-Centered Life (Part 1)

6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

I stood before a congregation of family and friends. I stood before my God. I stood before this beautiful young lady, her hands cupped in mine as I looked into her eyes. I was hearing the charge of the preacher; to love, to protect, to cherish this woman before me. As I contemplated this whole scene, there were times that I felt like nothing more than a little boy dressed in his father's suit, pretending to be grown up. And then, as I made my covenant before God, as I made this promise to my soon-to-be wife, as I made this vow before all my loved ones, I realized how much my life was about to be changed. Everything would be different. From that time forward, as I received Laura to be my wife, I would always be associated with her and she would always be associated with me. My lifestyle would change, my responsibilities would change. Marriage truly changes the whole course of two lives and, as a side note, I am thankful to the Lord for that change to have been filled with such blessing.

We know that the scriptures present to us our relationship to Christ in terms of a marriage relationship. In Ephesians 5, husbands are commanded to “love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...(5:25). And wives are to lovingly submit to their husbands, even as the church is to lovingly and passionately follow the lead of Christ. The point of all this, is that just as an earthly marriage forever changes the course and behavior of two people, our union with Christ is to forever change our course and behavior.

The text before us, Colossians 2:6-7, has been called by some as the key to this letters. Upon these words we find a hinge of sorts upon which turns Paul's thoughts of chapter one and all its theology to the thoughts of chapters 2-4 and all the real, practical outworking of that theology.

And if you would allow me the moment, let me sum up for you two key theological principles that we are to hold on to from the opening words of Colossians. The first is the radical supremacy of Christ. Jesus Christ is supreme. He is the Creator of all things (1:15-16); He is the Sustainer of all things (1:17) and since there is none other like Him, He is to be first in all things (1:18). He is head of the body, the church (1:18); He is life from death (1:18); and He is in fact God in the flesh (1:19). It just doesn't get any better than that.

In addition to Christ's supremacy, we find that Christ is also fully sufficient. Everything a person needs, everything that would bring a person true satisfaction in life is found in Christ beginning with man's greatest need, salvation, deliverance, rescuing from the power of fallen self, of sin and from the domain of Satan. In verses 19-21 we see such an incredible picture of our great Husband, who loved us and gave Himself up for us so that we might be holy and blameless. Christ is alone sufficient for our salvation and the implied argument to this point is that if Christ is sufficient so save us from our sin, what else is there that He cannot do for us? So, up to this point, we are to see that we cannot do better than Christ! We cannot improve on what Jesus Christ has done and upon what we have received of Him in the gospel.

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And so, in light of all these things, Paul now writes, **“therefore”** – in light of the supremacy of Christ over all things; **“therefore”** in light of the sufficiency of Christ for all things; and from here he launches into an incredible series of imperatives, of commands, of giving direction to the Colossians, of the Holy Spirit’s giving direction to us, of how to live the Christ-centered life; of how to keep the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ forever in our focus. The very first true command of the book of Colossians is found right here, *“Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him...”* The command here is to **“walk in”** Christ Jesus the Lord, to stay within the realm, upon the path that is Christ in every area of your life. What does this look like? How do we do this? I want to spend some time considering this, but it all begins with the right foundation, that is having received Christ Jesus the Lord. This morning let us consider then that to live the Christ-centered life we must first receive Christ Jesus the Lord.

I. We must receive Christ Jesus, the Lord (2:6a)

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord...

As we have mentioned, our text begins with “therefore”. “Therefore” – in light of the truths just learned about Christ and the Church, particularly in light of the fact that Christ is more than sufficient for salvation and more than supreme above and beyond all things, then this is how we ought to live.

Paul says, **“therefore as”** – that is in like manner, in the same way in which you first came to understand Christ – **“therefore as you have received Christ...”** Beloved, here is the gospel, for if anyone is ever truly to live a Christ centered life, it begins with having first truly receiving Him. So many make professions, saying Jesus Christ is Lord, but then, having never truly come to grips with what this means according to the Bible, go on living their lives for themselves, by themselves, maybe trying to apply a few “Christian” principles here and there, but never really experiencing the fullness of the Christian life because they have never truly “received” Him. So, what is meant by this verb, **“you have received”**?

The verb **“received”** is a technical and legal term that speaks of taking to heart, taking to mind the subject received because you recognize its authority. For example, if you receive a summons from the court to be there at a specific time, you heed the message as authoritative because you know there will be a consequence if you do not. This reminded me of Bunyan’s character, Christian, who had first received a summons, an authoritative message from Evangelist to travel straightway to “yonder wicket gate” whereupon instruction would be given him by which Christian could be relieved of his burden. But what did Christian do? He disregarded the counsel, the summons he had received from Evangelist to heed the words of Mr. Worldly Wiseman who offered a different course by which to travel, but a course that would end in death if completely transversed.

The word “received” literally speaks of taking to be in intimate or close association. It is the word used to describe Joseph’s receiving or taking to himself Mary to be his wife even though she was already found to be with Child, of course by the Holy Spirit (1:20). In the context here then, having received speaks of one’s drawing near to personally embrace something and of living now in light of that something. Consider that it is said that Moses received the Law then delivered it to Israel with all authority so that they might live in light of it. But just what is to be received according to our text. I see here two things that we must understand.

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1. We must receive the Message of the Gospel

First, for Paul, what the Colossians, and every believer in Christ, have received was the gospel. As you have received the truth, the message of the gospel, live in light of that. Remember that the false teachers were saying in essence, “Hey, Christ is good, Christ is great, but in addition to Him, in addition to what He had done, you need to add this secret knowledge we have found; you need a little more than what Christ has done or what Christ as offered to really be saved, to really find satisfaction and fullness of life. May I make this application? Beloved, beware of anything that you think will bring you satisfaction in life if it at all hinders or robs you of your commitment to Christ. Don’t think for a moment that we are not prone to the same temptations, to want to have Christ plus a little something else. I will be happy with Christ, of course, so long as I also have the right relationship, the right job, a loving spouse, my health. You can add to the list. Let me ask you this, “If you are single, is Christ really enough for you?” If you are married, is Christ your first love?” If you were to lose your health, your job, your friends, would you still trust Christ? Could you say with Job, “*Though He slay me, I will hope in Him*” (13:15)? Parents, have you fallen into the trap of thinking that unless my kids are in organized sports, or in the school dramas, or unless they have that \$500 trumpet to play in the school band that you are depriving them of something? Are these things bad. No, and they can be valuable for building character and wisdom. The problem lies in the fact that we forget that we were not called to receive such things as being sufficient, but rather Christ as sufficient. We would rather deprive our children church activities than non-church activities. We would rather deprive ourselves of prayer time, of Bible study time, of fellowship time than to dare intrude upon what we think will bring us true satisfaction and true meaning to life. And so we fill our lives with some many other things and by and large, when I get calls, when I do counseling I am dealing with people whose issues revolve around not being satisfied; not being satisfied with their spouses, with their children, with their jobs, with their lives. Have you received Christ? How have you received Him? The Colossians received Him as radically supreme and totally sufficient. Is this not the way you received Him? Is this not the message, the summons that you received that Jesus offers us no half-gospel which needs to be added to before truly satisfies you. I hope you have come to know the true gospel, full in every sense, and completely adequate for salvation as well as for the satisfaction of those who believe. There is nothing to be added in order to improving it. Have you come to hear the summons of the gospel?

First, that you are a sinner, whether you sin a lot or sin a little; whether your sins are outwardly hideous or inwardly hidden; each and every person has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Each and every one of us deserves the wages of our sins, which is death, eternal separation from God. The authoritative message is that each and every one of us apart from Christ is helpless, ungodly (Romans 5:6); sinners (Romans 5:8) and enemies of God (Romans 5:10). The message is that each and every one of us apart from Christ is alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds (Colossians 1:21). That is the bad news of the summons. The good news of the summons is this, **that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...”** (1 Timothy 1:14). How did He do this? He reconciled us, He made peace for us with God, having made peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20) and if you believe that His death on the cross was for you, that He came to die for you, then the good news continues that through His death in your place, for the wages of your sins, you have been reconciled to God in order, for the

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purpose of presenting you to God as a changed, holy, blameless and beyond reproach child of God. (Colossians 1:22).

And so, here is the question, “Have you received this summons?” Have you heard the message of the gospel as I have presented in part here and confessed before God that you are a sinner in need of saving? And just as I stood before God and a congregation of witnesses and received Laura as my wife, making a covenant, a promise, a commitment that forever changed my life and those changes are made evident in that I continue with my wife, in that we express our love to one another, in that I have two children as a result of this commitment, in that a large portion of my life is characterized by my association with her; I ask you, have you come before God and confessed before this congregation or any and every gathering of believers that you have received Christ as your Redeemer, making a covenant, a promise, a commitment that forever changes your life and that those changes are made evident as you continue with Christ, in that you express your love to Him, in that you are producing visible, viable spiritual fruit and that your life is characterized by your association with Him. That is what it means to have truly received the message of the gospel.

The gospel is the authoritative message of salvation as presented by the apostles and the prophets. Have we received the faith that according to Ephesians 2:20 is “built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, Christ Himself being the corner stone...”? Why do we read this Book? Because, beloved, in this Book is this gospel in purest form. We need not think it needs tweaking because it is insufficient for the day in which we live. The gospel has constantly proved itself more than adequate in every generation. We cannot add anything to its content or perfection. According to the Word of God, the gospel that Paul preached is the gospel that alone is to be received and is the gospel alone in which we continue to stand. (1 Corinthians 15:3-11). It is this message along that is said to be “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16-17).

Is the gospel truly found in the pages of Scripture? Let us believe the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who declared in John 5:39-40 –

39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

Beloved, if we pursue the Word of God without first receiving Christ and His message, without seeing our lives changed by Christ, or without a real and daily relationship to Christ, we end up with only something that is empty, frustrating and ultimately demonstrate an unwillingness to come to Him.

The summons, the message of the gospel, has come to us authoritatively by the apostles and prophets. This message has been recorded for later generations in the Scriptures. The gospel is truth which we can read, discuss, and understand and the more we devote ourselves to it, the more satisfying and fulfilling our lives will be. This truth is not like that which the false teachers at Colossae were peddling, some mysterious, hidden, and unknown truth available only to those who would add something to Christ. The gospel message to be received is a powerful

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truth that when understood, bring great delight, freedom and meaning to life. Have you received the message?

2. *We must receive the Messiah of the Gospel*

But Paul is not content to leave his readers with seeing this summons of the gospel as simply a message; as simply receiving words. Indeed I got ahead of myself because the gospel is not only the spoken written word of the Scriptures, but is also the Living Word. To receive the summons is to receive the fullness of the Savior, who, according to our text is **“Christ Jesus, the Lord.”** Do not miss this? We know Paul is fond of the words, “Christ,” “Jesus,” and “Lord.” In his letters, Paul uses the phrase **“Christ Jesus”** 90 times. He uses the phrase **“Jesus Christ”** 79 times. He uses the phrase, **“the Lord Jesus Christ”** 19 times. But only one time in all of his writings, in fact only one time in the entire New Testament that we find the phrase, **“Christ Jesus the Lord”** is right here.

Not only is the message of gospel to be received, but also the Messiah of gospel is to be received. We are being called here to do more than simply believe the truth that two plus two equals four. We are called upon to associate ourselves not only with a body of truth, but also with a real, living and wonderfully supreme and sufficient Savior who is purposely indentified in a three-fold fashion in our text as **“Christ Jesus the Lord.”** Why? What is the importance or significance of this particular and unique form of the identity of our Savior?

You’ve got to love how easily Paul weaves in for his readers an appreciation of all that the Old Testament promised concerning Christ. Let us not forget that whatever was being taught by the false teachers at Colossae, it included much substance and many ideas from the Old Testament. In fact, many believe that what was being taught was some kind of Jewish folk-religion, a mixture of Judaism along with the local religious superstitions. The point is, the readers would have been somewhat familiar with what Paul was communicating about this Redeemer who is Christ Jesus the Lord.

First, Paul calls the Redeemer “Christ” – the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah” meaning “Anointed or Chosen One.” The Messiah was the one promised to Adam in Genesis 3 as the seed that would crush the head of the serpent. The Messiah is the promised one to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15 through whom Abraham would become a blessing to all the nations of the earth because Messiah would come from Him. The Chosen One was promised to Moses as being the Prophet would come and to Israel as the One born of a virgin, the one who would be our Wonderful Counselor and as the One would be “pierced through for our transgressions” (Isaiah 7, 9, 53). The Messiah was the title given to the one prophesied of by Jeremiah, Micah and the other prophets. And like the prophets, the title of Christ, or Messiah points to our Redeemer being the Prophet who would finally and ultimately declare to use the good news of salvation. In Isaiah 61:1-2 we read:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God...

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Christ is the chosen Prophet who has fulfilled the His role of proclaiming Himself as the only way to God. As Hebrews 1:1-2 so wonderfully declares:

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son,

Jesus has fulfilled the office of prophet, declaring to us the way of salvation. Have you received Him as such.

Second, Paul identifies our Redeemer by His earthly name, Jesus. This is the name the angel gave to Joseph, saying in Matthew 1:21, **“You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”** The point is that Jesus Christ would not only **declare** salvation as the Prophet, but He would **become** salvation to all who would believe. Jesus did not come simple to make salvation possible for those who would believe, but rather actually saved those who would believe. So in this case, we find the title Jesus expressing the Priestly work of Jesus. It was Jesus, who as our High Priest, both offered the sacrifice for our sins, but also became the sacrifice, bearing the judgment of God for us at the cross. Have you received the Redeemer as Jesus, your High Priest as well as you the bearer of your sin?

Finally we see Paul describing Jesus as “Lord.” To confess Jesus Christ as Lord was the earliest and simplest of the confessions of the Church. What seems to us as extraordinarily simple was truly an act of defiance to the demand of the Roman Emperors who demanded they be worshipped along with hundreds of other so-called gods. To make the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord was to be willing to die to worship Jesus alone. In fact many did. These were so taking with Christ Jesus, their great Prophet and Priest, that they submitted everything to Him now as Lord. Jesus became to them their King, their Captain, their Master.

Paul wanted his readers, and the Holy Spirit of God wants us to understand and receive Christ Jesus the Lord. Notice that this is presented here as an all or nothing proposition. We cannot receive only part of this equation and have it make any sense. Our Redeemer cannot only be to us Christ the Lord, or Jesus the Lord, or Jesus Christ. With respect to what it means to truly receive Christ, we must receive Him in His fullness. We either receive all of who He is or we have none of who He is. Nowhere does Paul allude in this text that something else is need. We do not receive Jesus Christ as Savior and then, if we are so move or so committed, we later can decide to also receive Him as Lord. For the Colossians, it was not receive Jesus as a part of your salvation and your satisfaction for life and then add to all these other things.

Beloved, let me ask you, what can you add to the work of Christ Jesus the Lord? If you suggest anything you are saying that Christ is not supreme and not sufficient. What else can be added to His perfection? What can we do to improve upon what He had already done to the utmost? Have you received Christ Jesus the Lord.

Let me close with the eloquent words of Charles Spurgeon who sums this all up well saying,

We took him for all that we knew of him, and we found that he was much more than we then thought he was; but we did not pick and choose, and say, “We will have his pardon, but we will not have his sanctification.” We took the many-sided Christ, the Christ of many glorious characters, the Christ of ten thousand times ten thousand beauties; we took Christ to teach us,

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Christ to lead us, Christ to feed us, Christ to cheer us, Christ for us to obey, and Christ for us to delight in; we took a whole Christ. And then we gave him our whole selves. We said, “Lord, take us, body, soul, and spirit; “we prayed that the sacrifice might be bound with cords to the horns of the altar for ever. We made no bargains with him; we gave the freehold of our souls to Jesus, and of our bodies too, and we only asked that we might not have a pulse beating except for him, or our lungs heaving except as he was our very life. And we took Christ-at least I know I did,-for better or worse, in health or in sickness, to have and to hold so that even death should never part us. We put our hand in his, and asked him to take us and keep us for ever...

If we are to live a Christ-centered life, let it begin with the assurance that you have received this One who is Christ Jesus the Lord.

Soli Deo Gloria

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