

Title: Christ Beats All Challengers
Date: March 10, 2019
Subject: Having Jesus Christ means there's no need to look elsewhere
Scripture: Colossians 2:6 - 23

As you read the passage, it's easy to see that Christ remains front and center.

I. Christ is front and center vv. 6

The focus of receiving Christ Jesus as Lord isn't so much on the how as in by faith through grace, but on the what. Better, the who. Jesus Christ. There was a time when the people of the Colossian church began a relationship with Jesus Christ. They saw Christ as the only Savior and Lord. Did you know Jesus Christ is called Savior 24 times in the New Testament but He's called Lord 434 times? He's not merely the Savior/Messiah but he's the Lord, the ruler, the boss. Salvation isn't the end of Christian living. It's the starting point from which we are to go on toward maturity and perfection.

So far in the letter we've seen Jesus as Lord as he is the creator of everything (1:16), the sustainer of everything (1:17), the supreme ruler over everything including the church, earthly authorities and other-worldly powers (1:16, 18; 2:15). He is God (1:14, 19; 2:9). All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in him (2:3). There's no need to look any farther to find some other solution for getting into a right relationship with God.

Receiving Christ as Lord was a completed past action. There's also the point of living in the same way that we received Christ as Lord. This view of Jesus as Lord is to regulate our lives to show on an ongoing basis that he's the Lord. Paul just got done praising the people for the firmness of their faith in Christ and the orderliness of their lives based on their faith. It was no time to rest on how they did in the past.

II. Continue to live in him as Lord vv. 6, 7

The original language for what the NIV translates "live" is "to tread all around." It's the idea of walking and some translations word it that way (NAS, RSV). Adrian Rogers says there are two steps in walking – repentance and faith. I can imagine him walking around the platform, "repentance, faith, repentance, faith, repentance, faith."

One Bible scholar explains walking this way, "So walk ye in him; not only in imitation of him as he walked, in the exercise of grace, as love, patience, humility, and meekness, and in the discharge of duty; but by faith in him, going on in a way of believing in him, always looking to him, leaning on him, and deriving grace and strength from him: to walk in Christ, is to walk in and after the Spirit of Christ, under his influence, by his direction, and through his assistance; and to walk in the doctrine of Christ, abiding by it, and increasing in the knowledge of it; and to walk in the ordinances of Christ" (Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible).

It's living in union and intimacy with Christ as v. 7 elaborates on v. 6. It combines several metaphors. The first is a tree that's rooted. It's been transplanted. The root ball is plopped into the ground. Loose dirt is packed around it and maybe the tree is staked so it will grow straight up. It's a past, completed action.

People who place their trust in Christ have been transplanted from the realm of sin to Christ himself. This speaks of the salvation experience, a past, completed action. The result is their roots have the opportunity to spread out and draw nutrients from Him.

Next up is the analogy of a building. It sounds like it's past action but the verb tense is actually to be understood as present activity that's ongoing. It's like a house that undergoes continual renovation. The Christ follower is continually being built up. Some of it is exterior work but most of the building is inside.

The next picture is an athlete who exercises and trains to build up their body. Strengthened is also present action that continues. It's being strengthened in the faith, the teachings of Christ which is the Gospel. It's sometimes used as a legal term with the idea of confirming a contract. So the idea is that the more a person engages with the truths of faith in Christ, the stronger they'll be.

The last image is a river that overflows. The believer is to be a river overflowing their banks with thankfulness.

Here's another way the meaning has been articulated. "Fully expressed then, the text would run, 'As ye have received Christ, so walk in Him; as ye have been rooted in Him, so grow up in Him; as ye have been founded on Him, so be builded up.' These three clauses present the one idea in slightly different forms. The first expresses Christian progress as the manifestation before the world of an inward possession, the exhibition in the outward life of a treasure hid in the heart. The second expresses the same progress as the development by its own vital energy of the life of Christ in the soul. The third expresses the progress as the addition, by conscious efforts, of portion after portion to the character, which is manifestly incomplete until the headstone crowns the structure. We may then take the passage before us as exhibiting the principles of Christian progress...We must live near and ever nearer to the Lord, and seek that our communion with Him may be strengthened. On the other hand, it is not only by the spontaneous development of the implanted life, but by conscious and continuous efforts which sometimes involve vigorous repression of the old self that progress is realized. The two metaphors of our text have to be united in our experience. Neither the effortless growth of the tree nor the toilsome work of the builder suffice to represent the whole truth. The two sides of deep and still communion, and of strenuous effort based on that communion, must be found in the experience of every Christian who has received Christ, and is advancing through the imperfect manifestations of earth to the perfect union with, and perfect assimilation to, the Lord" (Alexander MacLaren).

Our view of Jesus as Lord comes with blinking red lights and loud alarms.

III. Don't seek other avenues to God vv. 8 – 23

Verses 8 – 15 compose one long sentence in the original Greek. The thought of diagramming it may send chills down your spine as you remember having to do that in English class, with lines going up and down connecting nouns, adverbs, dangling participles, modifiers, oh my. Thankfully, modern versions break the 8 verses into smaller segments. This section greatly expands upon the cautionary statement of 2:4 about not being deceived by fine sounding arguments.

A. The warning is be vigilant because there are deceivers (v. 8). We need to use our minds to not give in to deception while maintaining our dependence on Christ.

The deceivers are hunters pursuing their prey. They seek to lead people away from Christ to something else, anything else. They want to rob believers of what they have. They seek to spoil their trust in Christ. Since they're deceivers they use deceitful means and deceptive teachings and philosophies. This isn't a diatribe against philosophy per se, but against hollow and deceptive ways of thinking.

If deceivers engaged in an attack from the front they'd be readily recognized. If they immediately said that Jesus is totally unnecessary, it'd be easily noticed. Instead they use subterfuge and sneak attacks. They adopt some of the language of Christ and his teaching. They may say that Christ is good but if you want to go farther in your spiritual journey, then you need what they have to offer. They say things like "remind people they're worthy, they're magical." Close but no bananas cuz it leaves Christ out of the equation.

At the core it's man-made ideas, principles and thinking. They appeal to the things of the world that can be very appealing a person's vanity. For instance they seek to elevate people into god-like status or even Deity itself. That's quite the boost to the old ego. If they don't go all the way to saying people can become deity, they promise higher knowledge, something reserved for the select few.

Some gutsier deceivers openly seek to modify and minimize Jesus. The founder of The Jesus Seminar, Robert Funk wrote, "We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus' divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God. The plot early Christians invented for a divine redeemer figure is as archaic as the mythology in which it is framed. A Jesus who drops down out of heaven, performs some magical act that frees human beings from the power of sin, rises from the dead, and returns to heaven is simply no longer credible. The notion that he will return at the end of time and sit in cosmic judgment is equally incredible. We must find a new plot for a more credible Jesus" (cited by Mark Roberts, patheos.com/blogs/markroberts/series/unmasking-the-jesus-seminar). That kind of thinking appeals to lots of people who are looking for other alternatives.

The reality is these human inventions are hollow and deceptive. It's all smoke and mirrors with nothing to show for it. There'll be more on the deceivers but for now Paul hurries back to talk about Christ. It's as if he dipped his toe in some filthy, wretched mud and hurriedly wanted to wash it off.

B. Jesus Christ remains the way (vv. 9 – 15). The apostle restates what he said earlier about Jesus. "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Ah, that feels good. Back in 1:19, 20 the application was that he reconciled everything to himself. Now there's the reassurance that followers of Jesus have been given fullness in Christ. One translator says, "In him you reach your full life" (Moffatt). Jesus did all the work. We reap the benefit. There's nothing lacking. Don't need to search for some missing piece to the puzzle.

Paul reasserts Christ's headship over everything (v. 10). God performed spiritual surgery on us to positionally remove the sin nature, the old self ruled by fleshly desires (2:11). Believers' baptism reminds us we're connected to Christ's death and resurrection. He died. We died with him. He rose. We rose with him.

God made us alive with Christ (2:13). Because of what Christ did on the cross, God forgave us all our sins (2:13, 14). He disarmed the demonic powers and authorities (2:15) including the angels the false teachers tried to elevate as well as the false teachers themselves.

To get to the heart of verse 14, it'd be good to hear different phrasings. The old NIV - READ. Revised NIV "having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us." ESV— "canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands." Phillips – "Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads."

The original wording is borrowed from the business world about a handwritten note of indebtedness, an IOU. Most connect it to the Mosaic Law. It's important to note the Law was more than the Ten Commandments. There were numerous laws about rituals, ceremonial cleansings, and loads of other duties, along with the proscribed sacrifices for not fulfilling the Law. The part about the sacrifices is what's usually forgotten when people talk about this verse.

The keeping of the Old Testament law could not remove sin. God canceled it and all those sacrifices as the Mosaic covenant and everything connected was only a shadow looking forward to Christ who fulfilled all the requirements of the Law. Did you ever hug a shadow. Can't be done. There's no substance to it. The book of Hebrews details how the old covenant and its practices are old and obsolete. The Lord didn't cancel his moral law which he'd given long before the time of Moses and the system of sacrifices.

C. The second warning is sounded vv 16-23. Don't give in to the false teachings. Don't let someone judge you or condemn you or declare you lost because of not fulfilling false measurements of religiosity. The false teachers liked to do that in several ways. Some clung to the Jewish Law as an add-on to following Christ. They insisted that everything written by Moses had to be kept by Christians. Jesus during his life pointed out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees would insisted people keep the law when they, the experts weren't able to.

The nature of the false teaching at Colossae was enshrouded in high sounding superlatives and claims of spiritual ecstasy. They offered secret knowledge. They insisted on rituals and ceremonies. They were based on the flimsy evidence of visions detached from any connection to God's Word. They sought out other beings to worship instead of God with some saying that it wasn't right for humans to worship the Lord directly so they need to go through intermediaries. There was an emphasis on asceticism some of which took the OT ceremonial law to extremes. They harshly treated the body since the body is part of the material world and the material world is evil. It sought to boost the ego of listeners and especially the teacher. There was false humility.

The truth is it's man-made rules, ideas, concepts, rituals, ceremonies. As the Living Bible puts it, "they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires." Those who push these false teaching are disconnected from the Head who is Christ. If the people peddling the false teaching somehow are saved, they have an improper and distressingly lacking view of Christ.

We don't need to order our lives by manmade rules like ritual cleansings, what to eat or drink, fasting, festivals. Those don't bring us closer to God.

It'd be helpful to bring in a definition of legalism. "Legalism is an attitude, a mentality based on pride. It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself. A legalist assumes the place of authority and pushes it to unwarranted extremes" (Chuck Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, p. 81). He goes on to say that the things legalists do and don't do in attempts to gain God's favor "aren't spelled out in Scripture" (p. 82). Paul's not talking about the commands that are given in God's Word.

"Paul is here describing an over-developed zeal, a dedication that goes far beyond true Christian discipline and seeks to please God by extreme forms of self-denial. Dedication and discipline are a proper part of the Christian life. You must often make yourself do what God wants you to do, simply because you love him. That is the proper motive for it. Paul has already commended the Colossians because they led disciplined, well-ordered lives. But you can make a god of discipline. You can take perverse delight in making yourself do difficult things that win the approval of others, and (you imagine), of God as well" (Ray Stedman).

The believer is dead to the old operating system of the world. We don't need to follow its program. We're connected to Christ. The question arises in v. 20 – "why are you going back and submitting to the rules and practices created by people?" The Living Bible, "Since you died, as it were, with Christ and this has set you free from following the world's ideas of how to be saved—by doing good and obeying various rules—why do you keep right on following them anyway?"

Tenth Avenue North has a song *By Your Side* which portrays Jesus asking some related questions. "Why are you looking for love? Why are you still searching as if I'm not enough? To where will you go child? Tell me where will you run, to where will you run?"

The human created methodology leaks like a sieve. When someone invites us to the buffet table of spiritual thoughts and beliefs to entice us with the appealing aromas of self-righteousness or the promise of higher knowledge and becoming God, we can say, "No thank you. I'm full. I couldn't eat another bite. I have Christ." And then push away from the table.

The study notes have some practical questions to use in guarding against man-made imposters.

A heavily booked flight from Denver was canceled. A single agent was re-booking a long line of inconvenienced travelers. Suddenly an angry passenger pushed his way to the front and slapped his ticket on the counter. "I have to be on this flight and it has to be first class!" he insisted. "I'm sorry, sir," the agent replied. "I'll be happy to help you, but I have to take care of these folks first." The passenger didn't budge. "Do you have any idea who I am?" Without hesitating, the agent smiled and picked up her public-address microphone. "May I have your attention, please? We have a passenger here at the gate who doesn't know who he is. If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to the gate." As the man retreated, the people in the terminal burst into applause.

Paul is helping people find and maintain their identity in Christ. Don't need to search for more alternatives or additions.