

Sermon Notes

CHRIST IS EVERYTHING (COLOSSIANS 3:11)

I. Hold Fast

- A. Paul wrote to the Colossians *to teach believers about Christ and encourage us to hold fast to him.*
- Col 1:21-23: And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,²³ *if indeed you continue in the faith*, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.
 - Col 2:6: “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him [.]”
 - Col 2:18-19: “¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,¹⁹ and *not holding fast to the Head*, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”
- B. The occasion for this emphasis had to do with the circulation of a certain religious “philosophy” amongst the churches.
- C. This philosophy implied that Christ is not enough to meet the deepest needs of his people.
- D. Paul wants Christians to know that they do not need new religious philosophies to improve them spiritually because:
- Col 2:3: “in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
 - Col 2:9-10: “For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority”
- E. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been joined to his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension. As a result, we have been forgiven, liberated from the cosmic powers of the world, and reconciled to God himself.
- F. So Christians do not need this new religious philosophy or any others for that matter because we have Jesus—and Jesus is for the deepest needs of his

people in any and every season of their lives. He is our Savior. He is our Lord. And he will take care for us.

II. The Christian Philosophy of Life

- A. If Christ is enough, it follows that the philosophy of Christ, the way of Christ, is far superior to anything that the false teachers can propose.
- B. Contrary to the impression that these new teachers were giving, Christians are not...
 - 1. beggars in the world
 - 2. second-class citizens of Israel
 - 3. “almost-children” of Abraham
 - 4. helpless pawns in the hands of the great cosmic powers of the world.
- C. Instead, as far as God is concerned, we’re already in heaven.
 - Col 3:1-4: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
- D. From here, the apostle offers a Christian, Gospel-centered philosophy of life that stands in opposition to the self-dependent philosophy of the false teachers.
- E. Unlike what the new teachers were spouting, the Christian way of life is not an attempt to ascend to God by human effort. Rather, the Christian way of life descends from God to earth.
 - 1. The Christian way of life arises from the fact that the Christian is already, in some sense, in heaven.
 - 2. It stems from the fact that the Christian has already been accepted by God himself—and works itself out from there.
- F. The Christian life is about living out the life of Christ that we already have. It’s about living *out* the life of heaven—the life of Christ—that you and I received when we first trusted Christ to be our Savior-Lord.
- G. In 3:11, Paul raises one of the most radical implications of having the life of Christ: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

III. The End of the Old Names

- A. In context, Paul is talking about the new identity that is ours in Christ: “here” refers to the new self in Christ.

- B. If we have been joined to Christ, then Christ is our new identity. Just as a wife takes her husband's name, a Christian takes on the name of Christ when he or she believes.
- C. While that doesn't mean that we lose our own personal identities, it does mean that our individual identities have now been embraced into something greater, Jesus Christ himself.
- D. From now on, in *God's* eyes, in *God's* books, as far as *God* himself is concerned, you and I are ultimately defined by Christ, *not* by whatever other identities we have, or want to have, or would rather not have.
- E. Thus, there is a sense in which the old identities have been cancelled, dissolved, abolished in Christ.
- F. Verse 11 carries a sampling of key identities in the churches of that part of the world.
- G. Each identity on this list carries a certain value to it. In some cases, it's good. In others, it's shameful.
- H. Yet, the Gospel is greater than all these names. No matter what labels we carry, what matters in God's dawning new creation is the name of Christ.

IV. Greek and Jew

- A. The first pair of opposing identities that we encounter is that of "Greek and Jew."
- B. The Greeks and the Jews were the two major cultural powerhouses of Paul's world.
- C. The Greeks are a glorious civilization known for their philosophy.
- D. The Jews were entrusted with God's revelation: the Word of God, the Torah, the Law and the Prophets; and the covenants of God.
- E. Since God's Torah is far superior to human wisdom, the Jews would naturally see themselves as superior to the Greeks. The Greeks for their part naturally saw themselves as better than the Jews.

V. Circumcised and Uncircumcised

- A. This brings us to the second pair of opposing identities—seen from the Jew's perspective: "circumcised and uncircumcised."
- B. The Jews took circumcision seriously because God had told them to do so (Gen 17:9-14).
- C. Prior to the inauguration of the new covenant, circumcision was the mark of God's covenant with his people.
- D. But circumcision also had the effect of excluding the rest of the world. Those who were not circumcised did not belong to God.

E. Circumcision set up a wall between Israel and the rest of the world.

VI. Barbarian and Scythian

- A. The picture gets even more interesting. The uncircumcised world had divisions of their own: “barbarian” and “Scythian.”
- B. “Barbarian” was used by the Greeks to label foreigners who spoke what sounded like gibberish to them.
- C. The Scythians were a nomadic people who lived around the northern coast of the Black Sea (which is today Russia and Ukraine). They were despised for their brutality.
 - 1. The Scythians were the most repulsive form of barbarian.
 - 2. They were the most uncultured, uncouth, uncivilized, barbaric form of barbarian; the worst of the worst.

VII. Slave and Free

- A. The last pair of opposites: “slave” and “free.”
- B. The slave was the lowest class of human being. The slave had no rights. He or she was someone else’s piece of property.
- C. This list comprises a sampling of all humanity.
- D. From the Jewish perspective, we’re either circumcised or uncircumcised.
- E. From the Greek perspective, we are either Greeks or non-Greeks, barbarians or Scythians.
- F. Economically speaking, we’re either slave or free, or somewhere in between.
- G. Each of these labels carried a certain currency in the world of Paul’s day, a certain value. It had the effect of determining how people were treated in societies and possibly in churches.
 - The rich and powerful were looked up to.
 - The slave was looked down upon and disregarded.
 - The Jew stood apart from others.
 - The Scythians were scorned.

VIII. Christ Is All

God has saved us from our sins. In doing so, he has also renamed us. No matter what titles of glory we boast in, no matter what unpleasant labels were imposed upon us, deserved or undeserved, God doesn’t see them. Of course, God knows they exist. But as far as he is concerned, they are not ultimately decisive. Why? Because these titles have to do only with this present age. They will not be carried over into the age to come. Instead,

for God, the only thing that matters is *Christ*. Christ has been given to us—and “Christ is all, and in all.” To say that “Christ is all, and in all” means that Christ embraces each member of his body, you and me, regardless of our cultural backgrounds, economic standing, the failures that taint our individual stories, or whatever our accusers say about us. To say that “Christ is all, and in all” is also to say that Christ indwells each member of his body; Christ is in you and in me. The grand implication of all this is that God loves us with the same boundless love with which he loves Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today’s sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything with which you disagree or found difficult to accept?
3. How does the Christian philosophy of living differ from that of the false teachers?
4. What labels/names do you find most determinative for how you live?
5. How does it affect you to know that Christ is now your primary identity? How does this heal, correct, or transform your view of yourself and your fellow believers? How does this affect the way you treat your fellow believers, especially those from different cultures, races, and economic backgrounds?