

Spiritual Ground Zero: Christ – Epicenter of Our Faith! Colossians 1:15-20

We are **Christians**. That one word distinguishes us from every other world religion and system of belief. What does it mean? What does it imply about our lifestyle? We must explore these questions both in theological and in practical terms. In theological terms, we could say that:

- Christ is the central figure in Biblical revelation – Dan DeHaan
- Jesus Christ is the meeting place of time and eternity, the blending of deity and humanity, the junction of heaven and earth – Anonymous
- Most men are notable for one conspicuous virtue or grace. Moses for meekness, Job for patience, and John for love. But in Jesus you find everything – J. Oswald Sanders
- He stands absolutely alone in history; in teaching, in example, in character, an exception, a marvel, and He is Himself the evidence of Christianity – A.T. Pierson

Perhaps our Scripture reading has articulated it best of all. Paul says that Jesus is the “image of the invisible God,” that “all things were created by him and for him,” that “he is the head of the body, the church,” that “in everything he has the supremacy,” and finally that “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.” It is difficult to imagine a more comprehensive set of statements about our Lord. In short, he is Lord of all of life! This has some far-reaching practical implications that we must explore.

The first and most obvious implication is that we must have no other gods before us if we are going to be able to say that, “He is Lord,” with any credibility. We must be able to say with Martin Luther, “No other God have I but Thee; born in a manger, died on a tree.”

The second implication is that we must all be willing to examine ourselves in order to discover whether or not we have been giving place to other gods. Is our faith and trust truly in Christ and in Christ alone? As Roland Allen puts it, “What is necessary is faith. What is needed is the kind of faith which uniting a man *or woman* (italics my insertion) to Christ, sets him *or her* on fire.” Has the spark of life that resides at the core of our humanity been kindled and fanned into a flame by Christ as He resides at the center? Is Jesus on the throne of our life, or have we allocated to Him a lesser place at the periphery? We might well ask such questions of ourselves as these:

- Am I trying to serve both God and wealth? Jesus said that it cannot be done!
- If one were to review my spending habits, would they show that I am making a significant investment in the Kingdom of God in accordance with what Jesus has prescribed, or would those spending habits reveal that my investment in the Kingdom is marginal?
- Have I accorded the pursuit of pleasure the topmost position in my life? Then Jesus has been bumped out of first place!
- Is it my own ambition or agenda that drives me? Then I am no longer responding obediently to the voice of Jesus or to the promptings of the Spirit of God!

- How do I manage my time? Do I find myself propelled through each week from meeting to meeting, activity to activity, event to event, only to discover that invariably by the end of the week little or no time has been spent with the Master? People who are deeply involved in church work can fall into this soul-sapping trap. It is a monstrous irony that we should have little or no time for the One we are supposedly serving. We may begin well, focusing on Jesus, walking and talking with him as we expend our energies in doing the “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Phil. 2:10). But some day we may awaken to the awful realization that it is the works themselves that have the centrality – not Christ!

When Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7, he grieved over the fact that they were as busy as ever doing church work and upholding their doctrines, but they had wandered away from their initial passion for the Lord and their love of Christ. Such a church cannot endure. In fact, Jesus said that if they did not repent and return to their first love, he would remove their candlestick!

The third implication of Christ having the centrality in our life, as A. W. Tozer reminds us, is that we will learn to consider that everything in life is good to the degree that it conforms to the nature of God. Conversely, things are evil to the degree that they fail to conform to the nature of God. In other words, the Lord becomes our *reference point* as we take the measure of all things.

It is not a case of how the world thinks of things, but of how Jesus thinks of them. It’s not how our actions compare to those of our neighbors; rather, how do they compare to the behavior of Christ as glimpsed in the Scriptures?

When E. Stanley Jones questioned Mahatma Ghandi about how Christianity could be more acceptable in India, Ghandi said, “I would suggest, first, that all of you Christians ... begin to live more like Jesus Christ.”

In one of his noted sermons, Charles Spurgeon challenged his congregation with these words:

“A Christian should be a striking likeness of Jesus Christ ... We should be pictures of Christ ... There is nothing that can so advantage you, nothing can so prosper you, so assist you, so keep your eyes radiant with glory, like the imitation of Jesus Christ.”

When Jesus has the place of centrality in our lives, when the Master is on the throne of our lives, his character will begin to permeate our thought-life, our speech, and our actions. He will be increasingly in control of our allegiances, our agendas, our schedules, commitments, our worship, and our service. In short, he will increasingly become Lord of all!

This has been difficult for human beings from the beginning. In Old Testament times, life was very pluralistic and polytheistic. There were numerous gods, innumerable deities, demons, and angels who were thought to rule over various spheres of life. Many of them were malevolent beings who had to be appeased. Offerings would have to be made to the river goddess; other offerings would have to be made to the god of the field. Gnarled trees were often thought to contain nasty spirits called dryads, so once again a ritual would have to be performed in order to appease a dryad that had been stirred as one passed by the tree.

Life was so complicated. There were deities that presided over every sphere of life including politics, the family, war, fertility, and even the weather.

That is why when Jehovah called out a people for Himself, wanting to set them free from superstition and enslavement to false gods, the first commandment He gave them was, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Later, speaking through Moses, He said, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord, our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4).

But mark this, it is not enough to know that there is one God. Even the Devil knows that! Christians are required to do what Satan refuses to do. We are called to put our faith in God, trust in his power, hope in his promises, and obey his commands. We are called to give our allegiance to God and to no other! That means following Christ, to whom all authority and judgment has been committed by the Father.

This is what the first Christians did, and this is why they were hauled into the arena and fed to the lions. Under Roman rule, a conquered people were allowed to keep their tribal gods only as long as they were willing to acknowledge that Caesar was Lord over them. But the Christians said, “No! Jesus is Lord!” They determined that they would bring all of life under the lordship of Jesus. They would have none of the lordship of Caesar!

This is what we must do today. Caesar is still with us. He rears his ugly head in many forms. He orders us to keep the sacred separate from the secular. We are told to keep our faith private. I find it ludicrous that religion used to be out in the marketplace while human sexuality used to be in the private place of the marital bedroom. Now sex is everywhere, on billboards, in movie theatres, on prime-time television, while the Christian faith is not welcome outdoors. We live with what has become known as the Sunday-Monday divide. The sacred part of our life is experienced on Sunday.

As soon as Monday morning arrives, however, we make the transition into the real world, the realm of the secular! But with our God, there is no sacred versus secular! He is the Lord of all of life! He takes an interest in how we conduct our business affairs; he cares whether or not we are an honest employee or a fair and just employer; he knows what kind of entertainment occupies our leisure-time, including the kind of movies we view, television programs we watch, and books we read; he knows whether we spend our time witnessing to people or talking about them.

This morning, I am compelled to say that there can be no non-God area in our lives. Our task is to make all aspects and dimensions of life sacred, including family, work, worship, play, and whatever else our hands find to do. We cannot relegate the presence of God only to church buildings and “worship hours.” If we really believe what Paul wrote here in Colossians 1:15-20, then Jesus will be our spiritual Ground Zero, our Touchstone, and the Epicenter of our life, as well as our Founder. He really will be Lord of all!

Recently I joined a fitness club. I happened to notice one of the windows at the club. On it there are two silhouettes. They are of a man and a woman running. As I stood before the silhouette of the man, I thought, “I wish I fit that shape!” I’ve been working out for several weeks now, and I still don’t fit that shape. My girth, while decreasing, still overflows the silhouette. Some day, through discipline and determination, I’m going to be conformed to the image of the silhouette. But it will take time! It takes time and work for us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. It is the discipline of suffering and sorrow, of obedience through times of trial and pain that eventually conforms us to His image. The starting point is that moment when we decide to make Jesus Lord of *all* our life, placing Him at the epicenter instead of the margins. Today, we can make that decision together and have Jesus at the epicenter of our church. Let’s pray!