



Christ ALL We Need

Every bookstore has a self-help department—a section devoted to material aimed at the amateur, promising that he can become professional, or at least proficient, in the pursuit of his chosen activity. He is made to feel that success is inevitable if he will only follow this programme or that series of “easy steps.” There is ample evidence to suggest that this philosophy has entered into the thinking of the modern church. Christian bookstores now house a plethora of how-to volumes promising “new” and “proven” ways of “enriching” our experience of the gospel. No one should doubt the contribution that sound, Christ-centred literature can make to the lives of God’s people, but the premise underlying much of what has been put in print in recent times is surely flawed. It is as if what God has provided in Christ is not sufficient. Many contemporary books aim not at exposition or instruction, but at addition—not at bringing out the treasures of the gospel, but at adding to it, seeking to make it socially, intellectually, and culturally acceptable to the masses. That such an object is ultimately neither possible nor desirable doesn’t seem to matter.

When Peter wrote his second letter to the church, he spoke of a Christ whose “divine power hath given unto us *all things* that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3, emphasis mine). What Peter declared accorded perfectly with the message of Paul, his co-labourer. Paul presented a Christ whose grace is sufficient for every situation (2 Corinthians 12:9) and in whom His people are blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Paul expressed the longing that the believers at Colosse would come to “the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and

of the Father and of Christ; *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:2–3, emphasis mine). Having warned these same believers of those who were out to “spoil” them by proclaiming “philosophy” and “vain deceit” and promoting “the tradition of men” and “the rudiments of the world,” he urged them to rest in Christ: “Ye are complete in him” (Colossians 2:8–10); “Everything you will ever need, you will find in Christ.” Here, then, is the sum and substance of New Testament Christianity.

What is Christianity about if it is not about Christ!

Sadly, today’s Christianity is far removed from the original.

The church of the twenty-first century may pay lip service to the notion of inexhaustible wealth in Christ, but the everyday reality of walk, work, and witness tells another story. Everywhere is the underlying

conviction that those resources we have in Christ, with every associated means of grace, are simply not enough—they cannot “cut it” in this sophisticated age.

Today’s Christians need to answer the question, What think ye of Christ? The old preacher who affirmed that if we are wrong in our views of Christ, then every other view we hold suffers as a result, was right. The failure to realise the sufficiency of Christ has profound theological consequences. The church of today is riddled with bad doctrine and shallow teaching because its preachers look away from Christ.

Humanism is rife. God has been dethroned in the thinking of many. Man is king, and all the focus is upon his problems. These problems are inevitably earth-bound and temporal, with no recognition that it is spiritual bankruptcy that has made man what he is. Failure to understand this runs side by side with failure to depend on Christ. Hence the growth of counselling and therapy—man’s response to man’s problems. The thinking goes, What, after all, can the gospel of Christ really do to meet my particular need? How can Christ help me through this distinctly modern dilemma? The outcome of this sort of analysis is that many who profess allegiance to Christ are actually engaged in a vain search for satisfaction in empty human philosophy and practice.

The spectre of legalism looms large over the modern church. The church is often only a parody of what it ought to be, giving too much attention to what it perceives to be distinctives of Christianity and too little to Christ. Yes, there are many things we should and should not do as Christians, but let the living of this life be the joyful outworking of a personal relationship with Christ, which is something much richer and deeper than an unthinking and unfeeling (if not resentful) commitment to what we see as our duty. After all, what is Christianity about if it is not about Christ? Abiding and growing in Him is essential for a satisfying and fruitful Christian life (see John 15:1–11).

Worldliness is equally prevalent. The apostle’s call to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1; cf. vv. 2–3) goes largely unheeded. The blessed, eternal inheritance of the believer (see, for example, Psalm 16:5; 73:25–26; Lamentations 3:24; Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:4–5) is submerged beneath a sea of novel teachings, exciting experiences, and the all-consuming desire for the must-have gadgets of an increasingly materialistic age.

When materialism shapes the general outlook of any group of individuals, it will also come to mould their view of the church and its mission. A failure to appreciate the worth of Christ and the power of His message has spawned the pragmatism that is the order of the day in many modern churches. Preaching Christ is sidelined in the rush to appeal to the unchurched and the uninterested. All manner of blatantly unscriptural “evangelistic” strategies are pursued as the church sets about aping virtually every fad and innovation of worldly society. Everyone assumes that without something “dramatic” and “contemporary” we will not reach people. We must therefore accommodate our methods—and ultimately our message—to modern tastes, or face inevitable failure.

How foreign this is to the spirit of the New Testament! Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Romans 1:16). Here is the heart cry of one who neither courted the favour of his hearers, nor feared their response to his God-given message. Whatever his circumstances, and whoever stood before him, his resolve did not waver: “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). How much our society stands in need of plain, unadorned, Christ-centred gospel ministry and how infrequently is that need being met.

Paul had Christ at the heart of his message because Christ was at the centre of his life, and it showed. Every temporal consideration was “counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:7; cf. vv. 8–10). Do we share in this determination? Are we taken up with Christ, or are our lives so cluttered with the baggage of this world (much of it unworthy of true Christianity) that they repel those we are seeking to reach? John the Baptist’s persuasion of Christ—“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30)—was not just a perceptive analysis of where his ministry was headed: it is a motto for us all. That we should know and experience more of the Christ who is all we need is surely the greatest of all aspirations. Let us be ever looking to Him who is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). ■

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