

WHY AREN'T YOU MORE CHRIST-CENTERED?

Are you ashamed of Jesus Christ? Are you afraid to mention His name in conversation? Is Jesus Christ at the heart and core of your Christian life? Or have you relegated the name of Christ to the realm of maudlin, sentimental, mushy "religious" conversation?

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

These powerful and indicting words of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ring down through the centuries with fearsome import! Are you ashamed to mention your Savior, your King, your Lord and Master, in everyday conversation? Are you embarrassed by a discussion concerning Christ, your High Priest, over dinner in a fine restaurant? What part does the Captain of your salvation play in your daily life and activity?

These are critical questions.

Is sentimentalism to talk about Jesus Christ as though He were a *living* entity who occupies a central part in your life? Why should professing Christians squirm at the mention of their loving elder brother in the Faith?

The Vital Importance of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake about it—if you expect to be saved you had better acknowledge Christ in your life! There is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ *alone* can rescue you from the inevitable penalty of eternal death which all of us have incurred (John 3:16). He is the *only* hope you and I have of immortality.

If there is no resurrected Christ—no Messiah—then your faith is in vain (see I Cor 15:12-20). Apart from Christ *all* religion is mean-

ingless. There is no way to overemphasize the importance of the person of Jesus Christ to the Christian! Words alone are not sufficient to magnify the supremacy, the glory and the meaning of Christ to those who would fulfill their ultimate human destiny!

Paul taught that "...God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above *every name*, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess *that Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9, 10).

Those who do not acknowledge the transcendent supremacy of Jesus Christ in every sphere are not Christians at all!

The apostle Paul was perhaps the most Christ-centered individual who ever walked the face of the earth. He wrote, "For to me *to live is CHRIST...*" (Phil. 1:21). He was totally preoccupied with Christ! Paul was, in a sense, *obsessed* with Jesus Christ! Nothing was more important than to preach Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). Christ, and His life, death and resurrection, occupied the centrality of Paul's preaching and doctrine.

Paul, the other apostles, and the early first-century Christians were conscious of a continuing, living relationship with Jesus Christ through the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. John wrote: "And by this we know that *he abides in us*, by the

Spirit which he has given us" (I John 3:24). Christ actually takes up residence within the Christian life through the Holy Spirit! Paul wrote that "Christ in you" is "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Apart from the indwelling of Christ there is no hope. There is nothing to look forward to but oblivion. But with Christ there is *everything* to hope for!

What Makes You Righteous? No human being is righteous in God's sight of and by himself. It is the *righteousness of Christ* that makes any of us clean. We are all sinners—without exception. All of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. We are all doomed to pay the penalty for our sins which is eternal death in the lake of fire (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; I John 1:8, 10, etc.). We have all been consigned to eternal death by our own sins against God.

But God has provided a way by which we can be made righteous *in spite* of ourselves! Christ said, "*I am the way*, and the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6). Through Jesus Christ we can all be made righteous. There is no other way!

But exactly *how* does all of this work? Just *how* are we saved by Christ? The answer is: we are justified by faith in Christ's *sacrifice*!

We are told in Romans 3:26 that God justifies "him who has faith in Jesus." It is *through* Christ that we obtain access to God's mercy and grace. That is why He is "the way"! "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Offices and Titles of Jesus Christ

God. "But of the Son he says, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8).

Mediator. "And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).

King of kings. ". . . For he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).

Apostle. "Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1).

Deliverer. "And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

Master. "Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ" (Matt. 23:10).

Captain of Salvation. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10, KJV).

High Priest. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come . . ." (Heb. 9:11).

Counselor. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Savior. "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior" (Titus 1:4).

Judge. "And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42).

Lamb of God. "The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Advocate. "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous . . ." (1 John 2:1).

Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

Christ, and Christ alone, is the source of our salvation. It is He who is working out God's great purpose on earth. That is why he is called the "captain of our salvation" (Heb. 2:10, KJV). Those who would be saved must be willing to recognize, acknowledge and admit that Jesus is their "Lord" or "Master" so far as salvation is concerned. There is *no other door* through which one may pass in order to obtain mercy, justification and, ultimately, salvation.

Law-keeping Saves No One. One cannot be saved, for example, by the law. Law-keeping makes no one righteous—"For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law . . ." (Rom. 3:20). The law merely points out what sin is (verse 20, last part). "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). The law simply *convicts* all of us of sin! We are condemned by the law as sinners. None has ever obeyed that law perfectly but Christ. "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32).

The law, then, can do no more than *identify* sin for what it is and condemn us all for committing it! Once we have broken the law, no amount of future law-keeping can undo the damage that has been done. Law-keeping cannot make one righteous. It cannot justify for past sins. It cannot save you from the penalty of past violations.

Christ alone can do that.

Our eternal salvation is entirely in Christ's hands: "If we live, *we live to the Lord*, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, *we are the Lord's*" (Rom. 14:8).

To the true Christian, Christ is everything. Paul said: "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made *our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:30). Any righteousness the Christian may possess is not his own but is of Christ. It is Jesus who sets us apart (sanctifies us) and buys us back from certain

death (redeems us). We are *purchased* by His blood (I Cor. 6:19-20). Our future is entirely in His hands. (Write for our free article "No!—You Can't Earn Your Salvation.")

Only One Mediator. Jesus Christ, not any human being, is the head of the Church which is His own body (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). He leads the Church through the Holy Spirit. There is no human mediator or intercessor between God and man, "For there is one God, and there is *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). The Christian's relationship with God and with Christ is a *direct* one. It is not "filtered" through men.

We are accountable to Christ for our actions and our sins in this physical life. It is He who will judge "the secrets of men" at the last day.

No man should be allowed to rob us of our crown of righteousness which will be granted at Christ's return (Rev. 3:11). We must maintain a *direct*, personal, one-on-one relationship with our Savior! Certainly Christ has His true ministers (servants), but there is no true "Vicar of Christ" in God's scheme of things according to the Bible.

A word of qualification is necessary at this point. The fact that each of us should have a personal, one-on-one relationship with God does *not* mean that we should isolate ourselves as individuals from the Christian community. It does *not* imply that we should become "independent" Christians. Fellowship is a very important and necessary part of the Christian life. We should not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25, KJV).

Christians are expected to "come together" in congregational meetings (I Cor. 11:18, 20, etc.). We are to meet in the fellowship of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Where "two or three" are gathered together in Christ's name He is among them (Matt. 18:20). Whenever possible, those who have been begotten by the Holy Spirit should seek out fel-

low Christians and assemble with them in worship services. The Worldwide Church of God holds weekly services around the world. (For further information, please see page 4 of this reprint article.)

Saved by Christ. The Christian must *internalize* his belief and his faith in Christ. God first calls the candidate for the Kingdom, brings him to repentance and baptism, then gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once begotten, the Christian walks in "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Now his life, to use Paul's phraseology (Col. 3:3), is "hidden" in Christ. He trusts implicitly in Jesus Christ to save him. He knows and believes that it is only by faith in Christ's shed blood that he can be justified for sins. He looks to no other source for salvation. His confidence is in the Son of God who *lives* to make intercession for the saints (Heb. 7:25). He knows that "... We are now *justified by his blood*, much more *shall we be saved by him* from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9).

Those who have God's Spirit know that salvation, in the ultimate sense, is a yet-future event. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, *shall we be saved by his life*" (Rom. 5:10). The blood of Christ "cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7). We are reconciled to God through Christ, but we are not yet saved in the ultimate sense. We look forward to receiving the promise of eternal life at the resurrection (I John 2:25; I Cor. 15:51-54).

God's Plan. All of this is according to God's great purpose. It is all done in accordance with a pre-ordained plan. That purpose is being worked out under the personal direction of Jesus Christ. "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, *according to his purpose* which he set forth *in Christ* as a *plan* for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9-10).

Jesus Christ is at the heart of this plan. He is the focal point of it. The

entire purpose of the human creation of God is to be found in Christ! Therefore, to truly have faith in Christ (and all that that implies!) is to have eternal life! To be ashamed of Christ, to minimize the importance of His great office, to place Him anywhere but in *the very center* of your thinking, is to *reject* Him.

Nothing and no one is more important than Jesus the Savior! He alone holds the key that unlocks the door to eternity for every human being that has ever lived or died.

The gospel message is a message about Christ and His coming government (Isa. 9:6-7). He is at its center. He is described as the Savior of all mankind, and its coming King of kings and Lord of lords. He will rule over all of the earth in the world tomorrow. Ultimately, He will unite all things in Himself and in God the Father. God will be "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28, KJV).

Paul, realizing the sheer magnificence of God's marvelous plan of salvation through Christ, was moved to write: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Will you yet be ashamed of Christ? □

Address all communications to the PLAIN TRUTH office nearest you.

- *United States:* P. O. Box 111, Pasadena, California 91123.
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