

Christ Is All

In a letter Berridge wrote to John Thornton on 17th November 1784, he set out the glory of Christ – not merely as a fact in its own right, but as the essential and inevitable consequence in the heart and mind of a true convert. For the believer, Christ is all (Col. 3:11).

Berridge started by referring to the letter he was writing, but immediately expanded his thoughts:

What is a Christian letter without Christ, but a disciple without his Master? Where Jesus dwells, he will at length become Lord paramount – all our love, and trust, and hope [will be] uppermost in our preaching and hearing, praying and singing, writing and talking.

This immediately led Berridge to assert that the appreciation a man shows of Christ is the acid test of his good standing with God:

Grace is best discovered [shown] by the value it gives us for Jesus; and where he is duly valued, he will engage our adoration, love and trust, and these will command a cheerful obedience. As grace grows, Christ will increase, and we must decrease [John 3:30]. He will rise higher in the love, trust and value of the heart, and self will sink lower, till Christ becomes all, and we become nothing.

I pause. This, of course, is precisely what the Holy Spirit does when he witnesses in and to the believer.¹ The Spirit always glorifies Christ, making him increasingly known to, and thus appreciated by, the believer (John 16:14-15). It is in this way that the Spirit seals the believer's interest in the Redeemer (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6-7; Eph.

¹ See my *Assurance*.

Christ Is All

1:13-14; 4:30; 1 John 2:20-27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:6,9-11).² This ‘sealing’ is not something secret, unfelt by the believer. Far from it. It marks his assurance.³

Notice, further, how Berridge rightly used this to move to progressive sanctification: ‘Where [Christ] is duly valued, he will engage our adoration, love and trust, and these will command a cheerful obedience’. Excellent!⁴

Berridge went on:

What a blessed exchange is here of self for Christ; that is, of folly for wisdom, of weakness for strength, of beggary for riches, and death for life!

Coming back to progressive sanctification, Berridge spoke of the believer’s folly – and worse – of attempting to grow in practical holiness without keeping his eye on Christ, for both motive and power:

When grace enters a bosom, Jesus becomes the darling of the heart, the joy and trust of it, and all obedience without this only nourishes self-righteousness and self-applause, and will end in shame and woeful disappointment... When Christ becomes a sinner’s chief joy, self is felt the chief of sinners... This is regeneration, the new heart that makes a child of God; and without this, all convictions of sin and present reformation will come to nothing.

As Berridge said, a man’s view of Christ is the acid test. When ‘Jesus becomes the darling of [a sinner’s] heart, [his] joy and trust’, then:

This is the true circumcision, mentioned by Moses, when he says: ‘The Lord will circumcise your heart to love him with all your heart and soul, that you may live’

² In addition, we have the repeated experience of being ‘filled with the Spirit’ (Luke 1:15,41,67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 9:17; 11:24; 13:52; Eph. 5:18).

³ See the chapter: ‘Assurance’.

⁴ See the chapter: ‘Progressive Sanctification’.

Christ Is All

[Deut. 30:6]. And this regeneration, like circumcision, is an instantaneous operation.⁵

As John Newton put it:

*What think you of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.
As Jesus appears in your view,
As he is beloved or not;
So God is disposèd to you,
And mercy or wrath are your lot.*

*Some take him a creature to be,
A man, or an angel at most;
Sure these have not feelings like me,
Nor know themselves wretched and lost.
So guilty, so helpless, am I,
I dare not confide in his blood,
Nor on his protection rely,
Unless I were sure he is God.*

*If asked what of Jesus I think,
Though still my best thoughts are but poor,
I say, he's my meat and my drink,
My life, and my strength, and my store,
My Shepherd, my Husband, my Friend,
My Saviour from sin and from thrall;
My hope from beginning to end,
My Portion, my Lord, and my All.*

⁵ Pibworth: *Letters* pp335-336.