

June 14, 2020

The Core of Christianity

Colossians 3:1-4

Part 1

The keys to Christian flourishing are but two: Fellowship with Christ and Living by Christ.

LTS: Rom. 8:1-11

In the year 1539, when it seemed all Europe was experiencing the spiritual enlightenment of the protestant reformation, the greatest astronomical discovery in history was brought to light by a young medieval mathematician.

For countless centuries leading up to this historic moment, astronomers from around the world had sought to understand the inner-workings of our solar system. The prevailing view, of course, was that the earth held a fixed position around which all the other nearby celestial bodies found their orbit. Virtually everyone believed that! But there were problems.

In the years leading up to the great discovery, everyone in the field of astronomy understood that there were several logical and mathematical loose ends dangling from the accepted view. But despite the best efforts of our most brilliant astronomers, no one could resolve those problems. Every attempt at a resolution was crushed by what appeared to be an immovable dead end. Therefore, no one could TRULY understand how our solar system really works.

But then one day, after twenty years of careful observation, calculation, and experimentation a man came along who brought to the scientific community a six-volume treatise that smashed the immovable roadblock and resolved all the vexing problems. And though his resolution required six books to explain and verify, the solution was both beautifully elegant and embarrassingly simple.

You see, the reason no one could figure out how the solar system works is because the starting point for all their calculations was universally and mistakenly fixed upon the wrong planetary body. All their calculations were oriented toward the earth rather than the sun.

By now, some of you have rightly guessed that the six-volume treatise that forever changed the discipline of astronomy is that ground-breaking work entitled, *On the Revolutions*, and it's author was none other than Nicolaus Copernicus. It was he who famously discovered that our solar system is not geocentric but heliocentric. In other words, the center of our solar system is not the earth beneath us but rather, the Sun above us.

I thought about this story this week as I read the words of the apostle Paul who exhorts us in Col. 3:2, to "Set your minds on things above, NOT on the things that are on the earth."

In Paul's case, however, the goal was NOT to find the center our solar system, but to reveal the center of the Christian life. Like us, the Colossians were in danger of being diverted from the Preeminent Christ. Under the influence of false teachers (2:16), some had begun experimenting with Jewish legalism and rules about eating, drinking, religious festivals, and Sabbaths. Pursuing these things gave them an artificial sense that they were drawing closer to God.

Others were trifling with asceticism (2:18). The prevailing philosophy of the day taught that spirit is good by flesh is evil. So, if flesh is evil than we should deprive our bodies of basic necessities and suppress every desire for physical pleasure. Many even engaged in self-harm. This, too, gave them a counterfeit impression of superior enlightenment.

Still others found themselves dabbling in a kind of mysticism that involved angel worship and conjuring up visions whose source was something other than God.

In each case, professing believers were attempting to heighten their experience of the divine. They wanted something more. They wanted "fulness." They wanted rich spiritual flourishing. And this is the universal desire of every child of God, Right? We want to thrive in our walk with God, don't we? The problem, however, was that – like the astronomers in the days of Copernicus – their orientation was focused on things of earth rather than things in heaven.

You may remember that Paul referred to those man-made philosophies and religious practices (2:20) as "elemental spirits of the world," and "shadows of the true substance," things that "perish as they are used;" and "things that have the appearance of wisdom... but are of no value against fleshly indulgence." These are but things of earth.

The whole point of Paul's letter to the Colossians, however, is that if you have Christ, you have everything God offers, and infinitely more than you could ever ask for or imagine. Do you want spiritual "Fullness"? "In Christ all the fullness of deity dwells bodily and you are complete in Him."

Do you long for maximum spiritual flourishing? Paul's prescription for all of that is right here. And he reveals it in two simple prescriptions:

I. Keep Seeking the Person of Christ

II. Keep Setting your Minds on Christ

Now before we start feasting on the text together, let's take a moment to read it.

Read Col. 3: 1-4

Beloved, I want you to understand how important these four verses are. Paul is not dealing with tertiary matters. He is actually driving us into the very marrow of the Christian life! He's revealing to us the Core of Christianity. And the timing of these words is critical. The timing is critical because in the verses that follow, he is going to lay down two lists of sins that God wants us to either repent of or diligently avoid. But if he does that without first orienting and anchoring us to vital relationship with the Person of Christ, we will be tempted to think that the Core of

Christianity - and therefore the means of Christian fulness and flourishing – is all about saying NO to sin. And that will lead us right back to legalism and asceticism.

So, the first prescription for Christian flourishing is..

I. Keep Seeking the Person of Christ:

Read 3:1

1. The word “if” really carries the meaning “since.” “Since you have been raised with Christ.” And note what Paul is doing here. He’s appealing to their understanding of the great spiritual doctrine of our Union with Christ by which, in the mind of God, we died when Christ died, and we were raised when Christ arose from the tomb.

2. I say that Paul is appealing to their understanding of Union with Christ because they understood what baptism was about. Every time they witnessed a new believer getting baptized, they saw God’s established visible picture of Union with Christ.

3. So Paul is saying, “Since God now personally identifies you with Christ and Christ with you, “Seek the things that are above...”

A. The word “Seek,” here is an Act. Imp.

B. A better translation is “Keep seeking things that are above.”

4. Now, of course, this raises the question, “What are the “above things” that we should be seeking? Well, I don’t think he means that we should keep seeking angels (he’s already criticized that practice). He’s not inviting us to seek the pearly gates, or the golden streets, or loved ones who have gone before. I have to say that after I have been out of the country for a couple weeks, I can’t wait to get home. But the attraction isn’t toward the door on the front of my house, or the creek in the back yard, or the computer in my study. No! The one thing I’m looking forward to seeing more than anything else is the face of my beautiful wife! And what Paul is exhorting us to do is to Seek and Keep on Seeking the beautiful, life-giving, sin-destroying, soul-satisfying Person of Christ!

5. However, there is a logical follow-up question that comes immediately to mind. Namely; What does it mean to seek and keep on seeking the Person of Christ? That’s a great question!

6. The idea of seeking the Person of Christ may seem new or foreign to you, but it is a theme of towering significance in the Bible. Believers in the narratives of Scripture are often and repeatedly told to seek Him as part of their everyday walk with the Lord. The problem with illustrating this fact in a sermon is that in my study of these things this week, I found so many instances of the command to seek Him that after filling three pages of references, I lost track of how many I had discovered.

7. What does it mean to “Seek the Lord?”

A. Establishing a pithy, biblical definition has proven to be an exercise in futility for me, because it involves so many different things. In the Scriptures people who seek God

- 1) Seek to know him (Paul in Phil. 3)
- 2) Seek to serve him with whole-hearted devotion.
- 3) They seek his counsel (not leaning on their own understanding)
- 4) They seek his forgiveness, his protection, His love, his Salvation.
- 5) Seeking Him is sometimes expressed in joyful worship, or expressions of desperate need.
- 6) And every time we seek Him it is from a posture of dependence, faith and love.

8. Allow me to offer a few biblical examples.

In Matt. 6, Jesus tells us that Gentiles live with the constant anxiety of “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear? But He reminds his disciples that “your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

- A. (33) But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.” What is seeking his kingdom and righteousness but bringing your needs personally to God?
- B. 1 Chron 16:11, When David calls everyone to come to see the Ark of the Covenant set in the Tabernacle, he declares to the people, “Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! In the O.T. the Tabernacle was the dwelling place of God. But now that Christ has come, we seek God directly in Christ.
- C. 1 Chron. 22:19 When David instructed his son, Solomon about his first duty as king, he said, “Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God.” I take that to mean, Seek his fellowship, his wisdom to rule, and his provision to do what pleases the Lord.
- D. 2 Chron. 7:14 God spoke to Solomon in a dream the night before the dedication of the temple, and said, “if my people who are called by my name would humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” Here, seeking the face of God involves repentance and forgiveness.
- E. Psalm 27:8 David declared in prayer to the Lord, “You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, O LORD, do I seek.”
- F. Perhaps we could summarize by saying that seeking the Lord means that our lives are marked by dependent, interaction and communion with Christ. You see, beloved, in God’s eyes seeking his Son continually is...

the Core of the Christian life.

9. Now, we must proceed with care here, however, because seeking Christ is not the same thing as coming to church. It's not the same thing as having a bible study. It's not necessarily the same as singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, memorizing Scripture or having family worship. It is possible to do most things evangelicals do without really, truly and personally seeking the Lord. Through the prophet Jeremiah God promised, (Jer 29:13), "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me... how?... with all your heart.

10. Perhaps it's too obvious to mention here, but one of the marks of the unbeliever is that he never seeks Christ.

- A. In Jesus' day the religious leaders were always seeking a sign from Christ.
- B. Rom. 10:3 Paul says they seek to establish their own righteousness.
- C. Psalm 10:4 we read that "In the pride of his face the wicked does NOT seek him.
- D. And toward the end of the Gospel narratives we learn that the religious leaders we seeking to Kill Him.
- E. To all such people the Lord says, Hosea 10:12, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

11. On the Day you were born again, you sought the Lord with your whole heart. All Paul is saying is: Don't stop doing that! Keep seeking things above." And by the way, the reason it is better to seek Him than anything else is because (as Paul tells us here) Christ is seated at the right hand of God. In other words, Jesus hold the rank of ultimate supremacy!

12. Think with me for a moment about your relationship with the Lord. Perhaps you are confident that you belong to Him by grace through faith. But maybe, in your most honest moments, you have to admit that your spiritual life should be described as less than flourishing. Can I ask you a personal question? Since you have been raised up with Christ, have you continued seeking the Lord? Is your objective Union with Christ bearing the fruit of subjective communion with Christ?

13. You may be sitting here this morning thinking, "Communion with Christ"? Honestly, I don't think I have ANY relationship with Christ. And how could I. I have so much sin; so much guilt, so many bad choices in my past. He would never accept someone like me.

14. Can I just remind you of who Jesus is? There is one place in the Bible where Jesus actually speaks about his own heart.

The keys to Christian flourishing are but two: Fellowship with Christ and Living by Christ.

