

THE PASTOR AND CHRIST

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Paul declared the goal for the ministry to be "that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). Colossians 2:10 adds "and in Him you have been made complete." The thought is that by appropriating Christ's work on our behalf we can experience the fullness of God, that is, enter into a process by which God can accomplish every goal that He has for man. The word translated "complete" in Colossians 2:10 means literally "full." In ancient Greece it was used to describe a ship that was loaded with cargo, had a full crew and was ready to sail.

It is my conviction that many seminary graduates have sailed into the pastorate with an inadequate grasp of the truth that Christ is the complete answer to man's needs.

The problem in Colossae was evidently similar to that which is faced today. There is a trend toward emphasis on the "Jesus experience" thus minimizing the importance of the encounter with the historical Christ who died, rose, ascended and by His Spirit wants to work in our lives today.

One commentator described the heresy faced by the Colossians as follows: ". . . Christ was absolutely dethroned, . . . a shadowy fantastic transcendental idealism, and a mystical approach to God through angels and aeons, were substituted for the very Man, the real Cross, the actual death, the true redemption which consists in forgiveness of sin. But this theoretical error was accompanied by, and at root was the cause of, a grave practical mistake--a mistake pervading the entire life of those who received it. A series of minute observances, of petty devotions, of fragmentary rules and little ascetic efforts--the small ritualisms and smaller practical code of Judaizing superstition--were exchanged for the breadth and strength of Christian's supernatural life, begun in Baptism--for a real union with the Risen and Ascended Lord."¹

The material in this article was originally presented at Grace Theological Seminary as comprising the Louis S. Bauman Memorial Lectures, February 13, 1973. Three other messages will follow.

This explains the exhortation, "See to it that no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

In the challenge to this church to find its sufficiency in Christ, we discover that which should be our emphasis. If we are to minister effectively to our people we must be impressed that Christ is the means of fulness in at least three areas.

I. In Christ is fulness of knowledge.

Colossians 2:3 declares "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

He has the answers to the problems of the physical universe. "For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16,17). He was the creator, which means that He was the God who "in the beginning . . . created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). He also is the sustainer of the universe. The idea of "hold together" is literally that it "coheres into a system." Then the ultimate purpose of it all is focussed on Him because it was "created . . . for Him" (v. 16).

In this existential age there might be a danger of feeling apologetic about presenting such dogmatic truth. Sometimes it helps to hear the answers others are giving.

Dr. Harold Painter, Philosophy Professor at Orange Coast College speaking at the University of California at Irvine, October, 1970 declared:

All of us are pretty well hung up on the idea that this world was brought into being in time and space--that a Creator, therefore, is guiding its destiny--that the world is supported and sustained by a creator

Western man is unsure and uncertain. We are caught in confusion and we are not sure what the confusion is.

He (Darwin) said the species was not created in fixed form but produced through an interplay of mutation and environment--that it came about in an erratic manner--randomness--that there is no indication that anyone guided or directed it--survival of the fittest. And that the human

race may disappear like the dinosaurs, or it may not, or it may change.

Are you beginning to feel kind of empty? You do not need the God-creator preserver theory to explain life. You cannot make God an object of public scrutiny. The basic thing you can identify that is going on in this world is change and until you find security in change there is going to be a lot of uncertainty.²

Now there is a solid foundation on which to build! Sam Eisensten, a professor at Los Angeles State College, attempting to arouse teachers to a new dedication to their task prior to the 1971 school year observed that "teacher and student in both public and private schools need to do away with the rhetoric of 'generation gap' and multimedia cliché and realize that we live in an era of broken faith and broken icons, one of transition between unworkable strategies and values and a chaotic and terrifying future."³ According to him, education is in a "transition between unworkable strategies and values and a chaotic and terrifying future!" The current uncertainty and search for direction on the part of educational leaders should be a challenge to the preacher and teacher to bear an impact on society by presenting Christ as the answer. This is not always the case even in the so called "Christian college" however.

"For Christian education, therefore, to adopt as its unifying principle Christ and the Bible means nothing short of the recognition that all truth is God's truth. It is no accident that St. Paul, setting before the Philippian church a charter for Christian thought, wrote: 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true . . . think on these things.' He knew that Christian truth embraces all truth, and that nothing true is outside the scope of Christianity.

For example, Professor Gordon Clark of Butler University speaks of the Christian college, where such good things as 'giving out tracts . . . holding fervent prayer meetings, going out on gospel teams, opening classes with prayer' are the accepted practice; 'yet the actual instruction is no more Christian than in a respectable secular school . . . The program is merely a pagan education with a chocolate covering of Christianity. And the pill, not the coating, works . . . the students are deceived into thinking that they have received a Christian education when as a matter of fact their training has been neither Christian nor an education. Christianity, far from being a Bible-department religion, has a right to control the instruction in all departments. The general principles of Scripture apply to all subjects, and in some subjects the Scriptures supply rather detailed principles, so that every course of instruction is altered by a conscious adoption of Christian principles.'"⁴

To bear an impact on this society requires that each of us recognize that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). We must proclaim Him as the key to understanding the origin and purpose of the universe.

II. In Christ is fulness of righteousness.

Not only must we see Christ as the fulness of knowledge but the answer to fulness of righteousness. Man attempts to get rid of the guilt feeling. God rids us of guilt and attacks the cause of it, sin.

This is emphasized in several verses in Colossians.

"For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His well-beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:13,14).

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness of grace to dwell in Him, . . . yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (1:19,22).

"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (2:13-15).

Note that in Christ is "fulness of grace" (1:19). He took care of the sin question by dying in our place. According to 2:15 "through Him" we triumph over all the foes of the soul.

We all know what it means to enter into the victory of others. If our school team wins a game, we rejoice that "we won!" We did not play but we share the victory of the players. So it is with Christ. He has invited us to share in the victory of judgment for sin (2:14) and the provision of God's righteousness (1:22).

According to 1:12, 13 this righteousness qualifies us to be in the care of the King of Kings. His loving rulership begins the moment we accept Christ as Savior.

I had the privilege of visiting Dachau, the site of one of the infamous Nazi concentration camps. During World War II thousands lost their lives there through starvation or other means. In the memorial building are pictures of the terrifying life in the camp. The last scene portrays the prisoners on the day of deliverance by the allies. The transformation of their faces was amazing as they realized they were now free! I am sure that for those still living, the memory of that moment will never be forgotten.

The Lord "delivered us from the domain of darkness" (1:13). He "transferred us to the kingdom of His well-beloved Son" (1:14). We must never lose the joy of that deliverance if we would effectively communicate Christ as "the fulness of grace" (1:19).

III. In Christ is fulness of being.

The Colossians were chided for "not holding to the Head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God" (Colossians 2:19).

Prior to this it had been explained that "in Him all the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, . . . (Colossians 2:9, 10a).

We must be convinced of the grace of Christ but we must also recognize that Christ is the means by which we experience the fulness of being which God intended for man. Man individually and collectively needs to be "supplied" (2:19) by the Head if his complicated mechanism is to be "held together" (2:19) and operate in a proper manner.

Recently I cut down a tree in my yard. While I was using a chain saw the chain came off. When I put it back on it was inadvertently installed backwards so the dull edge became what was supposed to be the cutting edge. I could not figure out for a time what was wrong. The saw worked; there was a lot of smoke, but I was making very little progress! The chain had to be installed properly in order for the saw to accomplish what it was supposed to do.

We are made by God to work in a certain way. It is only as we allow the Head, the one who created us, to put us together in the proper manner that we can experience the full life of God and the accomplishment of His purpose for our lives.

We hear a lot today about church renewal. Robert Girard writing on the subject declares "that the church needs more than anything else to know Him! To know the Living Son of God. To know the Holy Spirit. To know Him personally. To know Him in the power of His resurrection.

If a church needs renewal, it is not primarily because it lacks dynamic leadership, or because it does not have revival meetings or Sunday night services anymore. The church needs renewal only because it does not know Him anymore! It has lost or nearly lost personal fellowship with Him. It has forgotten how to worship Him genuinely, as the Person He is. It has lost its capacity to enjoy Him, thank Him, praise Him, pray to Him, fellowship with Him, depend on Him, draw all it needs from Him, and have a love relationship with Him . . .

No church which fails to see Christ as a living, real Person, coming to us as a Personal Spirit will ever experience genuine spiritual and institutional renewal. Without the personal power of the Personal Jesus, there is no way to experience in a real sense the New Testament idea that in Christ "old things are passed away . . . all things are become new."

To try to change the church in structure alone, hoping to bring renewal to it, without bringing its people to faith in the Personal Jesus, is as unthinkable as hoping that by removing the wagon tongue and adding pneumatic tires the buckboard will suddenly become self-propelled.

Making Christ personal is the key to renewal. Whatever it takes to release His resurrection life in people and through people is what it will take to bring renewal.⁵

DOCUMENTATION

1. F. C. Cook, editor, The Holy Bible Commentary, Colossians, N. T., Vol. III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), p. 648.
2. L. A. Times, October, 1970.
3. L. A. Times, September 19, 1971.
4. Frank E. Gaebelin, The Pattern of God's Truth (Oxford Press, 1954), p. 17, 20, 21.
5. Robert Girard, Brethren, Hang Loose (Zondervan, 1972), pp. 211-213.