

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

"And He is the Head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 1:18-19; 2:9)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The consideration of Jesus is essential to the comprehension of God Himself, the Kingdom of God, and the salvation of God. "All things," we are told, "were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). Not only is He the Source of the creation, however, He is also the Object of it. The creation was neither incidental nor experimental. The Word of God is specific on this point. "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him AND FOR HIM" (Col. 1:16).

Jesus Christ – "God manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16) – is the primary consideration in the creation of all things. Everything was made in contemplation of Him and the government that has been placed upon His "shoulder" (Isa. 9:6). An intelligent appraisal of the impersonal creation is not possible apart from a perception of Jesus Christ. All things that are made can be properly perceived only through an understanding of Him and His redemptive accomplishments!

So far as humanity is concerned, man's reinstatement in God's favor, and his consequent dominion over the world to come," is the objective that God is implementing through His Son (Heb. 2:5-8). It is obvious that this purpose has not yet been fully realized. As it is written, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his [man's] feet. For in that He put all things under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him" – that is, the intended dominion of man is

not yet evident. Those who teach that all things are presently under man's dominion have simply not said the truth.

We do, however, "see Jesus, Who is made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:8-9). A glorified Man now sits at the right hand of God – exalted and reigning. He is ruling to bring "many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10). He is, further, the "forerunner" of the coming sons – an example of their fulfilled destiny. That is, they will ultimately share the dominion with Him, with Him remaining preeminent (Dan 7:18,22,27; 2 Tim 2:12).

Even though the saints are destined to reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:5; Rev 22:5), they are not the focus of Divine attention. Nor, indeed, are they the focus of angelic hosts, even though those superior personalities have been appointed as ministers for those "who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:13-14). The holy angels serve the redeemed, but are not subordinate to them. They primarily serve the exalted Christ, and He will bring them when He comes in all of His glory (Matt 16:27). The angels will gather the elect, but the elect will not gather them. Further, they will gather the saints at the word of the Son of God, to whom they have been made subject. As it is written, "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (1 Pet 3:22)

The entire enterprise of salvation centers in Jesus Christ, and Him alone. Nothing or no one must be allowed to upstage the enthroned Christ. No emphasis should be allowed greater prominence than Him. I say this because religious men have chosen to accent things other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Some have exalted the commandments of Jesus above the Lord Jesus Himself. Others have extolled His church more than Him. Still others speak more of the domestic family than they do of Jesus, or of social matters than they do the Head over all things. This does not mean critical matters are to be ignored or neglected. However, it does mean they are always to be considered within the context of Jesus Christ Himself.

Still others have chosen to accent various subjects, leaving Christ Jesus in the theological background. Some cannot speak a religious sentence without mentioning a preconceived “plan,” or an act of obedience, like “baptism,” or a subject like fasting, or even holiness— but they can speak a long time without mentioning the Lord Jesus Christ. For some people, the religious sect to which they belong is the most important thing.

But when the heavens and the earth pass away (Matt 24:35), and God discards them as a garment (Heb 1:12), there will be absolutely no doubt where God has placed the stress. As it is written, "Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Tim 6:15-16). Then Jesus will be receiving all of the attention. Every knee will be bowing to Him, and every tongue will be confessing Him. As it is written, ""That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

If you are placing the emphasis upon Jesus now, you will receive the blessing when He comes again. If He is not your emphasis – well, that is something you must not allow to happen!

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Chapter 2

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

Jacob spoke of Jesus when he prophesied, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). According

to this prophesy, Judah would remain predominant “until” a Divinely scheduled event. The tribe of Judah, out of which Jesus “sprang” (Heb. 7:14), was identified as God’s “lawgiver” (Psa. 60:7). The emphasis here is not so much on Judah as it is upon authority – rule and law – which postulates the existence of rebellion. Jacob’s prophesy provides a contrast between the old and new covenants. Both covenants were in the future during his time.

The old order addressed a covenanted people that were alienated from God, though chosen by Him. They did not have the mind of God, and thus were required to literally set God’s commandments before their eyes at all times. “And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut. 6:8-9). This condition was to continue until the appearance of “Shiloh.”

THE NEW EMPHASIS

“Shiloh” comes from a root word meaning tranquil and secure. It also includes the idea of joy – the result of safety. After Jacob’s death, and following Israel’s entrance into Canaan, there was an assembly of Israel at a place called “Shiloh.” There “the land was subdued before them,” and “Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions” (Josh. 18:1,8-10). This event, though typical of it, was not the subject of Jacob’s prophesy. He spoke of a person, not a place: “unto HIM shall the gathering of the people be.”

Christ, Who “is our Peace” (Eph. 2:14) is man’s spiritual Shiloh – the place of safety from the wrath of God. “Having made peace through the blood of His cross,” He became the rallying point for mankind. “By Him,” God intended to reconcile unto Himself those that were “once alienated and enemies in their minds” (Col. 1:20-21). The “gathering of the people” – both Jew and Gentile – is accomplished in God’s Son (Eph. 2:13-15). Unlike the old covenant, the new covenant includes a willing “gathering” of the people – they “come” to their “Shiloh.”

God used Caiaphas, high priest during the year in which Christ “offered

Himself without spot to God,” to foretell the gathering ministry of His Son. “And . . . he prophesied that Jesus . . . should gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad” (John 11:52). God be thanked for our “Shiloh”! God be praised for the glorious unity that is realized in Him, and in Him alone.

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Chapter 3

GATHERING ALL THINGS TOGETHER

The Divine intention concerning Jesus is clearly stated: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of time He [God] might GATHER TOGETHER INTO ONE all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph. 1:10). The Apostle peers into the ages to come and announces that “Christ” will be the point of commonality and value for everything.

The reconciliation accomplished by Christ is large in scope. In his elaboration upon it, Paul taught that “by Him” God intended to “reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20b). The intention of the Apostle was not to declare the necessity of personalities in heaven being reconciled to God. “Heaven” here speaks of the natural order that is separate from the residence of man. The term is frequently used in this manner in Scripture. “Heaven and earth shall pass away” (Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33); “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it was rolled together . . .” (Rev. 6:14); “And sware by him that . . . created heaven, and the things that therein are . . .” (Rev. 10:6); “And I saw a new heaven . . . for the first heaven . . . passed away” (Rev. 21:1).

The sin of man defiled all creation – even the created “heaven and those things that are therein.” Though not personally involved in the rebellion, “the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity.” The curse was not due to the adverse will of the creation – “not willingly.” It was the anticipation of the ultimate gathering of all things into Christ that constrained God to subject it to “vanity” in “hope.” The achievement of Jesus includes the deliverance of the “creature” [creation] itself “from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21).

There are also personalities in heaven that will be brought together with the redeemed from the earth” holy angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, cherubim, seraphim, the four living creatures, and the twenty four elders – not to mention God the judge of all, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

God has determined to gather “all things” together in His only begotten Son! He is the proclaimed Center of all things, and eternal significance is in Him, and Him alone. God has begun the “gathering” already; it shall be consummated at the manifestation of the new heavens and the new earth, “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

HIS ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT

The purpose of God cannot possibly be fulfilled without Jesus. No mortal will realize the objective for which he was created unless he embraces the Son of God through faith, and obeys His Gospel! “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). This is “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (Acts 4:10). His “name” identifies His Person – particularly in the capacity of a man. It is as a Man – yes, “THE Man” – that He saves us (I Tim. 2:5). He was born as a man (Gal. 4:4), lived as a man (Heb. 2:18), and through “weakness” He was crucified and died as a man (2 Cor. 13:4). He arose from among the realm of dead men, and ascended into heaven as “the Man Christ Jesus.” His “name” speaks of that whole spectrum of commissioned experience.

He alone had been invested with the responsibility to “accomplish” a decease “at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31), and He alone has been given the authority to give eternal life to those God has given to Him – all of which will be united with that death (John 17:2). Moses gave the Law; the prophets heralded a time of universal blessing; but “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

Salvation cannot be realized by merely adhering to a set of moral principles and examples! Over fifteen hundred years of moral futility proved that, of himself, man is not capable of achieving perfection before God. Having searched heaven and earth, the witness is given from the Throne that He alone is able to “save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Heb. 7:25).

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Chapter 4

ONLY FOUNDATION

PROPHECY – "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa 28:16).

FULFILLMENT – "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." (1 Pet 2:5-6)

The relationship between God and man must be built upon the Person of Jesus. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11). His accomplishments form the foundation for

man's acceptance with God. It is what makes salvation both righteous and sure. It is not based on the individual, but on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is trusted by the individual.

There must be some means provided on earth through which a body of people can be built "for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph 2:22). That provision is Jesus Christ, the "Sure Foundation" upon which the church is built together, and as individuals as well.

The earthly aspect of our Lord's mission was finalized when the people were "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:5-10). After Jesus had ascended into glory and been exalted at the right hand of God, that "offering" became the ground or basis for man's acceptance. It was laid "once," and is potentially effectual "for all." Because of its stability and consistency, it will never be laid again.

God, Who could not keep quiet concerning His intense desire for man, moved Isaiah to foretell the nature of this Foundation. It was a Foundation that God Himself put in place: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16). Its sureness, or stability is confirmed by this fact: "He that believeth on Him shall not make haste," "will not be disturbed" (NASB), "will never be dismayed" (NIV). Peter states the trusting one will "not be confounded," "put to shame" (NKJV), or "disappointed" (NASB). In other words, there is no deficiency in this Sure Foundation.

The "Stone" speaks of a ledge of rock that cannot be dislodged or made ineffectual – a Stone "for a foundation." Man's relationship to the Living God will be built upon this Foundation! A "Tried Stone" is one that has passed through the same area of testing that caused the fall of the ones being reconciled. It is "Precious" because of its effectuality, and "Sure" due to its eternal stability.

Spiritual instability can be traced to not being securely on the Foundation. We know this is the case because "he who believes (trusts in, relies on, and adheres to that Stone) will not be ashamed or give way or hasten away

[in sudden panic]” (AMPLIFIED).

Under the new covenant, the key issue is not the moral responsibility to be obedient – and there is no acceptance apart from that obedience. Man is, however, accepted because of the Foundation, which is also the cause for stability and safety. His lifetime is to be spent appropriating the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus,” or in the winning of Christ (Phil. 3:8). Those who emphasize duty and include Christ have distorted the Foundation. It is the Foundation that is to be emphasized, with the inclusion of duty!

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Chapter 5

NO MAN COMES TO THE FATHER BUT BY HIM

It is possible to develop an empty tradition using the shell of true words. Thus it is with this very truth in mind, Jesus said: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man comes unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). That is not intended to be a mere creedal statement – it rather proclaims that provision has been made for men to actually come to the Father! It presumes that there is a desire to approach unto God, to receive His approbation, and to be received into His favor. Where this desire is absent, these words will have no meaning – words spoken by the Lord and Savior Himself.

There is also the underlying idea of necessity. The life of faith can only be lived in a coming-to-the-Father posture. An approach to religion that does not require constant recourse to the Father is false to the core. In fact, eternal life, as defined by the Lord Jesus Himself, is knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:2). Knowing God without

coming to Him is simply impossible.

Further, this is not merely a legal requirement. In the world, objectives can be accomplished by ignoring man-made laws, or illegally. Thus do men gain wealth by theft and dishonesty, etc. But this condition does not exist in the Kingdom of God. Men cannot come to God illegally, so to speak. They must come “lawfully,” as the Apostle indicates (2 Tim. 2:5). They cannot begin to approach the Father except by Christ. They cannot come on their own merit, or barge into the presence of the Almighty because of a perceived crisis.

What does it mean to come to God “by” the Lord Jesus Christ? It is more than the recitation of a creedal-like statement. To come to God by means of Jesus Christ involves His personal accompaniment. After all, Jesus “suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). That speaks of more than an initial coming to God. Although believers do have “boldness and access” to God, it is “through faith in Christ” that they do so (Eph 3:12). Take Jesus out of the scenario, and coming to God, in the sense intended in the Ephesian text, becomes impossible. If men expect, for example, to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need, they will have to obtain it through their great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb 4:15-16). He will have to “bring them to God.”

This is one of primary reasons God has “called us into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). It is why we have been “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27), and been raised with Him to sit in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). There is no such thing as a person who can stand in the presence of God without Christ. That is precisely why we read expressions such as “in Christ” (Rom 3:24; 8:1,39; Eph 2:6,20), through Christ” (2 Cor 3:4; Gal 4:7; Eph 2:7; Phil 4:7), and “by Christ” (2 Cor 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:19; 1 Pet 5:10). It is why He is our Intercessor (Rom 8:34), High Priest (Heb 2:17; 7:26; 7:1; 10:21), and Advocate (1 John 2:21).

Salvation is not initiated, worked out, or culminated without the Lord

Jesus Christ. This is because salvation in its entirety is really about coming to God (Heb 7:25), being reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18,20), being accepted by God (Eph 1:6), and being recognized in heaven as his sons and daughters (2 Cor 6:17-18). None of this can be accomplished independently of Christ Jesus. He alone can really “bring us to God.”

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Chapter 6

WITHOUT HIM, MAN CAN DO NOTHING

Even though man has been reconciled to God, he is not free from restraint. He is free, yet not independent; at liberty, but with license! In Christ, man becomes a liberated dependent – a freed slave. He is made free in order to conform to the truth by doing what is right, or doing the truth (1 John 1:6). He is free to serve God (Heb 12:28). He is free to “obey the truth” (Gal 3:1). He is free to come to God (Heb 7:25). He is free to resist the devil (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9). He is free to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit 2:11-12). He is free to perfect holiness in the feast of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1). He is free to run the race set before him (Heb 12:1-2). He is free to set his affection on things above (Col 3:1-2). He is free to be holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). He is free to walk in the light (1 John 1:7). These, and much more, are areas of liberty for all that are in Christ Jesus!

In passing, it ought to be noted that all “Christian” recovery systems deny the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. They teach professed believers to confess that they love God, yet their lives are out of control. Then, they give them routines that are guaranteed to bring control back into their lives. Since they cannot sell Jesus, they have to sell their systems, which, in reality, make slaves of men – but not slaves to Jesus.

There are other things that we have NOT been freed to do – and if they are done, it is not owing to any influence of Jesus, who Himself is our life (Col 3:4). These things are evidence of death, not life. We have NOT been freed to sin (1 Cor 15:34; 1 John 2:1). We have NOT been freed to continue in a state of spiritual immaturity (1 Cor 14:20). We have NOT been freed to be worldly (John 15:19; 17:14-16), conform to the world (Rom 12:1-2), or to love the world (1 John 2:15). We are NOT free to live strictly for ourselves (2 Cor 5:15), or to despise the people of God (1 John 3:14).

We are not so free we do not need Jesus! When Jesus said we could do “nothing” without Him, He was speaking of things pertaining to life and godliness. We cannot do what we have been freed to do without Christ Himself. There is no such thing as an act of obedience that can be rendered independently of Christ Jesus. Without Him, we can do nothing! In its entirety, salvation leaves the individual totally dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Should a person shape his life in such a manner as to exclude or diminish the influence of Jesus, he will at once become impotent in the matter of pleasing God – in anything! Let no person imagine for a moment that if God has called us into fellowship with His Son (1 Cor 1:9), that life may be lived without sustaining that fellowship in faith. Yet, the religious woods are filled with people who are living in aloofness from Jesus, unacquainted with His word and His ways. Still, they are supposed “church members” in good standing. They have been deceived!

This fact of not being able to do anything without Christ was in our Lord’s mind when He said to His disciples, “I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5) – i.e. “nothing” relevant to fruitfulness to God. Men can build empires – political, financial, or religious – without Christ! They may also achieve personal wealth and fame independently of “the Vine.”

Anything that is not immediately associated with God’s “eternal purpose” is really “nothing” – destined for destruction. Peter tells us that “the

works” of man that are in “the earth” shall be burned up at its destruction (2 Pet. 3:10). All such works can be achieved “without” Jesus!

A considerable amount of confusion has been produced in this area by the religious claims of men. Denominational empires have been successfully built by those claiming to have been led and empowered by Christ. Yet, these are often at variance with the revealed purposes of God. Their existence by no means contradicts Christ’s assertion that without Him, nothing can be done!

Spiritual fruit results from comprehending God’s purpose in Jesus. It is fruit that will “remain” after the passing of the heavens and the earth (John 15:16). A simple test of the sort of things that are accomplished “with” Christ is this: whatever survives the passing of the heavens and the earth is accepted with God. These are the accomplishments of which Jesus spake when he said, “without Me, ye can do nothing!”

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Chapter 7

GOD’S ATTITUDE TOWARD HIM

The consideration of God’s attitude toward Christ is a critical one. If we are to be “followers of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1), we must be united with Him in this matter. One cannot be “acceptable to God” (Rom. 14:18) and entertain a persuasion of Jesus that differs from His. Unity with God on this issue will result in salvation; variance will result in condemnation!

God views Christ within the context of His purpose regarding mankind. The fact that Jesus is His “only BEGOTTEN Son” is not the determining factor in His consideration. As regards salvation, it is the

ACHIEVEMENT of the Son that is the point of Divine contemplation.

In his prophecy of the coming Messiah, Isaiah spoke of One in Whom “the Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake.” With Divine anticipation, it was foretold that “He will magnify the law, and make it honorable” (Isa. 42:21). “Well pleased,” in this case, is a term denoting God’s thorough satisfaction with the accomplishments of His Son.

When Jesus was first revealed as the Son of God, the Father’s pleasure in Him was audibly expressed from heaven at His baptism (Matt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22). The heavens had not reverberated with Divine speech since the day when Israel had received the Law in Horeb. It is as though, until the confirmation that Jesus Christ was His Beloved Son, there was no occurrence upon earth that merited Divine commentary.

That day when Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, plunged Him beneath the baptismal wave, God could not hold His silence! He saw His “eternal purpose” beginning to take shape as the ministry of His Son was launched. For the first time in almost 1,500 years, the “voice of the Lord” that “shakes the wilderness” (Psa. 29:8) penetrated the environment of Satanic deception. “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased,” proclaimed “a voice from heaven” (Matt. 3:17). Jesus was, in God’s estimation, fully qualified to embark upon the ministry of reconciliation!

Approximately three years later, toward the close of Jesus’ earthly ministry, Jesus “took Peter and John and James, and went up into a high mountain to pray” (Luke 9:28). As He prayed, His inner glory, concealed from the vision of men in the body, overcame His flesh, and “the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:29).

At Sinai, in the presence of God, “the skin” of Moses’ “face shone,” affected from without by Divine glory (Ex 34:29). But it was different with Jesus. The glory that He had laid aside in His humility (Phil. 2:7) surfaced in a Divine union that none of the sons of men had ever before realized. There, in unequalled spiritual communion, even the clothes of

Jesus became saturated, as it were, with glory!

In the grand conclusion of this unparalleled experience, the voice heard three years before again penetrated the sky: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matt. 17:5). Perhaps a little more than 30 years later, and shortly before his martyrdom, Peter recalled that heavenly testimony. "We" were "eyewitnesses of His majesty," he recounts. "For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED" (2 Pet. 1:17). Peter's words confirm the continued pleasure of the Father in the Son.

The only question that remains is whether or not men are "well pleased" with the Son. If they are, they are in the will of the Lord. If they are not, they are at a variance with the Living God, and, consequently, without "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

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Chapter 8

AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND

The centrality of Jesus is also perceived in His current location at God's right hand. A great deal is made of this in the Apostles' doctrine. In the conclusion of his gospel, Mark writes, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and SAT ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (Mark 16:19). Luke provides us with some of Christ's final words; "Hereafter shall the Son of man SIT ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE POWER OF GOD" (Luke 22:69).

The writer of Hebrews proclaims that He "sat down on the right hand of

the Majesty on high” after He “had by Himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3). At least three other times, the same writer affirms this reality (Heb. 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), thereby emphasizing its importance.

This truth was announced on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33), and as Stephen was about to make the transition from this world to the next, he saw Jesus “standing ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD” (Acts 7:55,56). Christ’s presence at God’s right hand is associated with the following.

1. The sending of the Holy Spirit: "Therefore being by the RIGHT HAND of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." (Acts 2:33)
2. The giving of repentance and forgiveness: "Him hath God exalted with his RIGHT HAND to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31)
3. The absence of condemnation: “"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the RIGHT HAND of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom 8:34)
4. Where He will remain until His enemies have been openly made His footstool: "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my RIGHT HAND , until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Heb 1:13). "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the RIGHT HAND of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." (Heb 10:12-13)
5. Where He is authoring and finishing faith: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the RIGHT HAND of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2)
6. Where all adversarial powers have been made subject to Him. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the RIGHT HAND of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (1 Pet 3:22)

7. His High Priestly ministry: "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the RIGHT HAND of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." (Heb 8:1)

8. The display of Divine power: "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own RIGHT HAND in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:19-20)

9. The location of "the things above:" "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the RIGHT HAND of God."(Col. 3:1).

This is the place of favor, of rule, and of acceptance! The current position of Christ is itself a witness of God's attitude toward Him. "All power in heaven and earth" has been given to the One on the Father's right hand (Matt. 28:18). Peter proclaims that Jesus is "gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him" (I Pet. 3:22). A dispensation of authority with that magnitude demonstrates a measure of Divine favor and good pleasure that is without equal.

It is not possible for Jesus to receive more power than He presently possesses at the right hand of God! It is impossible for His greatest foes – Satan and all of his hosts – to be any more in subjection to Him than they are right now. There is no level of Kingship that Jesus does not presently possess – He is "Head over all things" (Eph 1:22), "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), the "only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15). He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5). "All power in heaven and earth" has been given to Him (Matt 28:18).

The Scripture nowhere affirms that Jesus is going to return to earth "to reign" – something that is commonly taught, and has been incorporated in many Christian hymns and songs. When Jesus is revealed from heaven, He will be revealed as what He presently "IS" (1 Tim 6:15). That kind of

authority and power is required to save people!

All of that is inherent in the proclamation that Jesus is presently at the right hand of God.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

"And He is the Head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 1:18-19; 2:9)

Chapter 9

THE KINGDOM GIVEN TO HIM

The Kingdom of God is the only kingdom recognized and approved by heaven. All other kingdoms are destined to become "the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). This Kingdom "shall break in pieces and consume all these [worldly] kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44b). Its final revelation began during the earthly ministry of Christ, was inaugurated on Pentecost after King Jesus had assumed its reins, and it shall be consummated when He comes again (2 Tim. 4:1).

The Kingdom of God always has been – it is an "everlasting Kingdom" (Psa 145:13; Dan 4:3; 7:27; 2 Pet 1:11). The coming of this Kingdom (Matt 6:10), or the Kingdom being "at hand" (Matt 3:2), or the setting up of it (Dan 2:44), is speaking of the REVELATION of the Kingdom, not of its beginning. It addresses the MANIFESTATION of a Kingdom that has existed all along, yet was not perceived by men. Nothing in Scripture suggests that the "eternal God" (Deut 33:27) was ever without a Kingdom. The first revelation of God was not the beginning of God, nor is the revelation of His Kingdom equivalent to its genesis.

In Daniel's vision of the Messiah, He saw Him returning to glory "with the clouds of heaven: – the same Jesus whom the disciples saw ascending into heaven (Acts 1:9-10). Upon returning triumphantly to heaven, it was

revealed to Daniel that “there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:14). That is the Kingdom over which Jesus is now presiding.

In a parable that mirrored His own exaltation, Jesus said, “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return” (Luke 19:12). In confirmation of the fact that He was speaking of Himself, He later revealed that His Father had “appointed” a kingdom to Him: “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me” (Luke 22:29). Paul taught that reconciliation to God consisted of a translation “into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col. 1:13) – which confirms He has received the Kingdom God appointed unto Him. Christ has charge of the enterprise of salvation, which is a revelation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is governing the heavenly Kingdom in order to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). In order to do this, every adversarial power must be subject to Him – the glorified Man Christ Jesus. Every productive power, whether angels, arch-angels, seraphim or cherubim, must also be subject to Him (1 Pet 3:22).

His current government will continue until God has “put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (I Cor. 15:25-26). Confirming that He does, in fact, have “all power in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18), Jesus has personally defeated death, taking back His life after He had laid it down (John 10:17-18). It was not possible for Him to be “held,” or retained, by death. He rose from the dead, personally triumphing over “the last enemy.”

However, His unquestionable authority will again be made known when He shouts the dead out of their graves, throwing death to the ground and robbing it of all of its power. Jesus Himself said, “the hour is coming, in the which ALL that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). At

that time, the work of reconciliation shall be complete, and the reconciled and the Reconciler shall begin the ages to come “together.”

Speaking of that commencement, the Apostle wrote, “Then comes the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and authority and power” (I Cor. 15:24). The enormous sacrifice entailed in the “Man” assuming the control of the Kingdom is seen in this Apostolic affirmation; “And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (I Cor. 15:28). He Who “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:6) will bear the effects of man’s reconciliation throughout eternity. He has received the Kingdom in full knowledge of this! His great heart anticipates the time when He shall have “delivered up the Kingdom of God” by the acknowledgment, “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me” (Heb. 2:13). He will have brought them all safely to glory – right through the territory Satan ruled.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 10

GOD’S SERVANT

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." (Isa 42:1)

God has always had servants – individuals appointed to accomplish a heavenly objective. Abraham was God’s appointed “servant” to father a nation that would bring forth the Messiah (Gen. 26:24). Moses was the “servant” of God, selected to give the Law (Num. 12:7), and Caleb served

the Lord by pioneering the entrance into Canaan (Num. 14:24). God referred to Job as “My servant Job” because he represented an upright influence in his day (Job 1:8; 2:3). The prophets were called “His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7), and “My servants the prophets” (Zech. 1:6) because they proclaimed the mind of God to their generation.

When it came to the matter of reconciling men to God, however, these servants were inadequate. The work was too large for them. Prophetically, Isaiah, himself the servant of God (Isa. 20:3), announced the coming of a Servant of a higher order. “Behold MY SERVANT, Whom I uphold; Mine elect, in Whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles . . . He shall not fail nor be discouraged . . .” (Isa. 42:1-6). What a marvelous Servant is described by those words!

The “judgment” which he would bring forth was not one of condemnation. He proclaimed, “for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47). This salvation was a Divine judgment of God – He had judged men worthy of Divine consideration, and had thus provided for their salvation in His Son! This worthiness was not owing to what they had said and done, but was rather related to the fact that man had been created in His own image.

Matthew proclaims that Christ’s redemptive work was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt. 12:17-21). He came to serve God by providing a means for the nations of the world to come to God. Among other things, this confirms that God desired to save men, else He would not have foretold the coming of the ultimate Servant, then sending Him into the world.

Over and over Jesus testified to the reality of Himself serving God – not men, not even His own personal interests. “I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:30). “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). “And I seek not Mine own glory: there is

one that seeketh and judgeth" (John 8:50).

For Him, serving God meant speaking THE WORDS that God had given Him to say: "'Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (John 14:10). "'I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him" (John 8:26). "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). "I speak that which I have seen with My Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father" (John 8:38). "And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak" (John 12:50).

The Lord Jesus particularly said that THE WORKS He did were those He saw the Father doing – works that were assigned to Him by God Himself. "But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given He to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me" (John 5:36). "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me" (John 10:25). "'If I do not the works of My Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:37-38). "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (John 14:10).

How will heaven regard a person who sets his own will and desires on the throne of his heart, and chooses to ignore the will of God? What of those who are not serving God, but their own personal interests? How is it possible for such a person to be related to Jesus Christ, into whose image

God is conforming His people (Rom 8:29-30)?
THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

"And He is the Head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 1:18-19; 2:9)

Chapter 11

GOD'S ANOINTED

The Word of God has taught us to identify anointing with "consecration" to Divine appointments (Exod. 28:41; 30:30; I Sam. 10:1). Both kings and priests were anointed according to God's direction (I Sam. 15:17; Exod. 29:29). Elisha was "anointed" to be a prophet in the place of Elijah (1 Kgs 19:16).

Among men, respect was to be had for the Lord's "anointed" – "Saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (I Chron. 16:22; Psa. 105:15). This requirement was not due to the fleshly, or natural, merit of those who were anointed. Rather, it was owing to God's choice and ordination of them, with the particular prospect of the coming Redeemer. Divine appointments are to be respected by men, and they are not to be found despising or refusing to hear God's anointed ones – particularly the Lord Jesus Christ, God's "only begotten Son" (John 1:18).

The greatest responsibility ever committed to anyone by God fell upon Jesus – the redemption of man! The Lord God "anointed" Him for that activity, appointing Him to a work which no other person or dispensation could accomplish (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18). Thus our blessed Lord is referred to as "the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14), "the Great God and Savior" (Tit 2:15), and "the blessed and only Potentate" (1 Tim 6:15). Because of being appointed to be the Savior, God has "given all things into His hands" (John 13:35). This is why "all power in heaven and earth" has been given to Him (Matt 28:18). It is why "angels and authorities and powers"

have been “made subject to Him” (1 Pet 3:22). This is the reason for Him being “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 19:16). It is why “God also hath highly exalted him, and given Him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9). This is what is required to save men – whether a single man, or all of “the elect.”

When prophesying of the coming Savior, mention was made of His rule. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa 9:6-7). “Son,” “government,” “throne,” “kingdom,” “judgment,” “justice” – they are all related to the saving of men – a work Jesus was “anointed” to do.

The early church recognized this appointment, as evidenced in their prayer; “For of a truth against the holy Child, Whom Thou hast anointed . . .” (Acts 4:27). The Apostles proclaimed His Divine anointing; “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power . . .” (Acts 10:38). God is declared to have anointed Jesus: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Heb 1:9).

The terms “Messiah” (Dan 9:25-26) and “Christ” (Matt 16:16; Acts 9:22) mean “the Anointed One” – the One GOD anointed to carry out His great salvation. Jesus is our Lord, but He is God’s “Christ.” Therefore we read, God, or the Lord, “and His Christ” (Acts 4:26; Rev 11:15; 12:10). He is also referred to as “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20).

As “Christ,” Jesus is the One upon whom God has placed the emphasis. He is the only Man that has been exalted and empowered to “save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). He alone can bring them to God (1 Pet 3:18), and He alone can present them together, “a glorious church, not having spot, of wrinkle,

or any such thing” (Eph 5:27). The call of God can only be facilitated through Christ Jesus (1 Pet 5:10). Only He can effectively and consistently shepherd the sheep (Heb 13:20). He is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:4), and the solitary Intercessor for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25).

This – Christ being the Anointed One – is why it is wrong to place the emphasis on the church, or the family, or some human institution. Jesus Himself is the Christ – the One upon whom God has placed the emphasis and shined the light.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 12

BEGINNING OF THE CREATION OF GOD

The Apostles, according to the will of God, have revealed God’s ultimate objective for men. It is a grand objective, and is worthy of all acceptance. “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Theologians have been divided over the meaning of these words. Some have chosen to believe that God has arbitrarily, and without apparent cause, selected some to go to heaven. Others believe that individuals are not the object of Divine determination, but a class of individuals – those that come to Him by Christ (Heb. 7:25). Generally speaking, the latter is the correct view; but it certainly does not exhaust the text.

The point of declaration is not who is predestined, but the OBJECTIVE of the predestination. “The Lord knows them that are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). However, He has not made men privy to that information. Instead, He

informs them to “depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19), which is the designated means of becoming identified with His purpose.

Observe the revealed intention of God: it is to conform men “to the image of His Son” – to make them like Jesus! The reason for this determination is also revealed: “that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren.” Jesus is to the redeemed what Adam is to sinners. He is the “Firstborn” (Heb. 12:23), God’s “First begotten” (Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5) – the first One of a new order of men. A new race has been begotten in Christ – a race that thinks and acts like God! This new order of men is referred to as a “new creature” [creation] (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and Jesus is the “Firstborn” of every [such] creature” (Col. 1:15). This is the truth proclaimed in Revelation 3:14; “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” – i.e. He is the One who launched this new creation.

Jesus served God because He wanted to. The Father’s will was His “meat,” or source of inner nourishment. Jesus did not obey God because He “had to,” but “for the joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:1-2). Satan had “nothing” in Him – no foothold, or area through which inroads could be made (John 14:30).

God has determined that everyone that receives His Son will be conformed to His likeness. That is the Divinely appointed result of faith – it will be the fruition of a consistent walk “in the light as He is in the light” (I John 1:7).

There is no mystery about this reality. Men are wasting precious time trying to determine whether or not God has selected them for salvation. They make their “calling and election sure” by devoting themselves to the activities God has appointed for men. “And beside all this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity . . . Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL

NEVER FALL” (2 Pet. 1:5-10).

God has already announced His determination for those that have received His salvation. They will ultimately and completely be “like” His Son (I John 3:2). That reveals how precious His own Son is to Himself! He is the central object into which all will be gathered! If that conformation is not taking place, there is no reason for a person to call himself a “Christian,” a follower of Christ, or a member of Christ’s church.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 13

PRECIOUS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." (1 Pet 2:7-8)

Before God, people are evaluated in strict accordance with their view of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact postulates that the individuals have been exposed to the Gospel, which is “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). The spiritual condition of everyone outside of Christ is described as being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18), “without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12), “enemies” (Rom 5:10), “enemies in your minds” (Col 1:21), and those who are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:2-3). Therefore, it is clear that all men stand in need of the Savior God sent into the world – the Savior who died for the sins of the world, was raised triumphantly from the dead, and is

exalted to the right hand of God. He is a Savior that has been invested with all power in heaven and earth, and is declared in the Gospel, and expounded by the “apostles’ doctrine.” Our text has particular application to those who have heard this Gospel.

For those who do not see themselves as having the kind of need Jesus supplies, He becomes “the stone which the builders disallowed” – i.e. such people are classed with those who demanded the crucifixion of Jesus. To such people, Jesus becomes “a Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence.” The message that announces and extols Him reveals the wretchedness of their own condition, and causes their unbelief to rise to the surface and express itself in defiance against the Lord. Our text says they “stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto they were also appointed” (1 Pet 2:8). Other versions read, “which is also what they were destined for” (NIV), “as they were destined to do” (NRSV), “and this was the purpose of God” (BBE), “as had been planned” (CJB), “whereunto they are set” (DOUAY), “it was the fate in store for them” (NJB), “so they meet the fate that was planned for them” (NLT), “unto which thing they were ordained” (PNT), and “as [those who reject Him] were destined [appointed] to do” (AMPLIFIED).

Whatever a person may think of this text, it certainly is one that demands our attention. Among other things, it confirms that God has made no provision for salvation apart from His Son. It also declares that those who reject His Gospel, and do not believe it, have stepped outside the perimeter of Divine provision. Scriptural examples also confirm that there is not endless Divine toleration of the rejection of His Son. Jerusalem was rejected after being exposed to the ministry of Jesus for three years (Matt 23:38; Lk 13:35). The hard-hearted Jews at Antioch of Pisidia were judged “unworthy of everlasting life” after hearing the Gospel one time (Acts 13:46).

How different it is for those who believe the Gospel, and willingly and eagerly “obey” the Gospel, as compared to those who “do not obey the Gospel” (2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17). The new covenant has added the

spiritual dimension to man's relationship with God. The elements of joy and satisfaction are associated with the discernment and acceptance of Christ's role in the "salvation of our God" (Psa. 52:10). The personal involvement of the believer is brought into harmony with the revealed purpose of God. Not only is Jesus central in God's redemptive objective, He Himself is the heart and core of the believer's experience. "Unto you therefore which believe HE IS PRECIOUS . . ." (1 Pet. 2:7).

The preciousness of Jesus to believers is what constrains them to live for Him, who "died for them and rose again" (2 Cor 5:15). Those who are not willing to live wholly for Christ are those to whom He is not "precious." That circumstance puts them in the category of those who stumble over Jesus instead of receiving and building upon Him. Now, there is something to think about.

Tomorrow: "Access to God"

PRAYER POINT: Father, in the name of Jesus I thank You for a Savior that is Lord, and yet is exceedingly precious to those who believe. THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

"And He is the Head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 1:18-19; 2:9)

Devotion 13 of 20

PRECIOUS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE

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Chapter 14

ACCESS TO GOD

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:2). "For through him we

both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (Eph 3:12).

The remission of sins has freed man to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. That love values the accessibility of its Object, the Living God. Thus Christ, through whom we have access to God and to His grace as well, is of inestimable value. "For THROUGH HIM we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). That includes access to His grace as well – the grace "wherein we stand," are firm, resolute, and unwavering.

Access to God is a practical view of "peace," which was achieved by Christ's redemption. "And [Jesus] came and preached peace to you which were afar off [Gentiles], and to them that were nigh [the Israelites]" (Eph. 2:17). In fact, Christ "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20), which is the basis for man's "access," or authorization to "draw near" (Heb. 10:22).

Another contributing factor to this access is the fact that we have been "reconciled" to God, even though we were formerly "alienated and enemies IN YOUR MIND by wicked works" (Col 1:21). This infers that those who do not think like God are His enemies. His thoughts and ways are contrary to theirs (Isa 55:8-9). That circumstance cannot be resolved by the enemies. A work must be done that thoroughly addresses the natural enmity that exists between God and man.

Praise the Lord, that is what was achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ. He put away our sins (Heb 9:26), reconciled us to God (Rom 5:10), made peace between God and us (Col 1:20), and then made us a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10) – one that is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24). Those who are in Christ Jesus are participants in a New Covenant, of which it is written, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness,

and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb 8:10-12).

The outcome of all of this is that the saved of the Lord now "have access to God." It is not seasonal – as the high priests of Israel who came before the Lord once a year (Heb 9:7). In Christ, contact with the God of heaven is not now and then, as it was with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets. Now, because sin has been thoroughly addressed, and provision has been made for continual cleansing (1 John 1:7), we can "come boldly" on a regular and extended basis (Heb 4:15-16; 10:22).

Man's access to God is realized "by faith" – by means of a persuasion of its reality. Faith is not an end of itself, but is the means of appropriating the benefits of the new covenant. Paul provides an inspired recognition of this situation in Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by Whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." God has been accessed when "this grace" has been appropriated. Grace, in this case, is associated with obtaining "all things that pertain to life and godliness" – resources required to live acceptably in this world.

The saints of the Lord could not possibly be in a better situation while they remain in this world. It is not comely, to say the least, for those with such privileges to live stumbling, halting lives.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

"And He is the Head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 1:18-19; 2:9)

Chapter 15

THE HOPE OF GLORY

"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this

mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:" (Col 1:27)

God's purpose in Christ begins in this world and comes to maturity in "the world to come." The primary objective of His salvation is not realized in the realm of the temporal, but in the sphere of the eternal. The inheritance to which God summons man is "reserved in heaven," completely separated from the cursed order (I Pet. 1:4). Until the inheritance is possessed, those in Christ live "in hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2).

This "hope" is so vital, that salvation is said to be appropriated by it. "For we are saved by hope," declares the Spirit to the churches (Rom. 8:24). "Saved" – not in the sense of sins being forgiven, but in the sense of working out our own salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). To attempt to work out, or confirm, this salvation without the specified hope is nothing but an exercise in vanity. Salvation is designed to be driven by hope, expectation, anticipation, and the joyful prospect of good things to come. If that element is missing in life, it will become tedious, and filled with debilitating frustration and disappointment.

The object of this hope is unseen – one that has not yet been realized. In fact, the Object of the hope is in heaven, and thus hope itself is said to be there. "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5). Those who possess this hope are a heavenly-minded people. Their affection is set on things above, not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2). They join those who lived before them in a pilgrimage that finds them looking for "a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" (Heb 11:10), and desiring "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb 11:16).

The "one hope" to which we have been called (Eph. 4:4) is God's determination to conform the called to the "image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). A single word that portrays this conformation is "glory." The completion of that conformity will occur when the saints are "glorified" (Rom. 8:30b). Glorification consists of the absence of everything cursed, as well as the presence of everything for which the people were saved. It

will take place when “mortality is swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. 5:4), and “death is swallowed up in victory” (Isa. 25:8; I Cor. 15:54). The resurrection of the dead is identified with this glorification (1 Cor 15:42-43).

Until the “redemption of the purchased possession” – the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14) – believers are “waiting for the hope of righteousness” by faith (Gal. 5:5). Their possession of Christ, who dwells in their “hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17), is God’s pledge of glorification. In Apostolic language, it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). How precious He is!

Let the church get to the business of preparing for the glory, looking for it, and living in its prospects. Modern religion has pinned the head modern church to the earth, and hope has receded into the background. Professed Christian leaders are not placing this hope before the people. They are not proclaiming and expounding it. This failure is largely responsible for nearly every deficiency found within the nominal church. Ponder this: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And EVERY MAN that hath this hope in him PURIFIETH HIMSELF, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3). That is the unvarnished truth of the matter!

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 16

SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." (Mal 4:2)

Another aspect of Christ's preciousness is the remedial effects of His ministry. Sin has blasted the race of man, leaving "wounds and putrefying sores" upon his spirit. The situation is described in God's assessment of Israel: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isa 1:6). In a Psalm, David described the impact of a sinful condition upon the discerning individual: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness" (Psa 38:5). Standing in the presence of the Lord, Isaiah described his condition in these words: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:5).

When unforgiven men are conscious that they are being faced with the Lord of glory, they do not brag about themselves, or seek to have higher self esteem. By comparison with the Lord, they rather come to see themselves as they really are – sick and ailing in their souls. They sense a moral and spiritual defilement in themselves. Inspired men have reported them saying such things as, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), "Help us" (Acts 16:9), and "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Toward the conclusion of the time when God spake "unto the fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1), hope was declared for man's condition. Malachi, who stood at the beginning of a period of four hundred years of Divine silence, foresaw a healing for the infection of iniquity. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings [rays]" (Mal. 4:2). What a wonderful promise! The warmth of Divine grace would restore spiritual health to men. It is no wonder that the Psalmist spoke of God's "saving health" (67:2) – an inner health that

is brought about by extended exposure to “the Sun of righteousness.”

O, how much men need this healing! However, they will never experience it until that are brought under the influence of the living and exalted Christ. This will take place where the Christ is faithfully proclaimed as God has set Him forth to humanity. That is found in “the Gospel of Christ” (Rom 1:16), which is “the record God hath given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11).

Jesus would fulfill the prophetic word of David; “. . . I will yet praise Him Who is the health of my countenance” (Psa. 42:11). Again he said, “God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us . . . that Thy way be known upon the earth, Thy saving health among all nations” (Psa. 67:1-2).

God’s “saving health” comes from the acceptance of Christ’s atonement for sin. The persuasion of the effectuality of His sacrifice will lead to a response that will lift the countenance, and produce an inner health that will enable a recovery from sin! This inner cleansing is referred to as the healing of the soul (Psa 41:4). It is a purifying work referred to as being “washed” (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:22), and “cleansed” (Eph 5:26; 1 John 1:9).

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 17

A COVERT

"And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isa 32:2)

In a promise of spiritual safety, God spoke through Isaiah of a coming “Man” that would provide refuge from the storms of this life. Isaiah prophesied, “And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for A COVERT from storm and from rain” (Isa. 4:6). Again, he declared, “And a Man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and A COVERT from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2). The first prophecy declares that a COVERT will be provided for safety. The second affirms that the covert will be a “MAN” – as compared to something constructed by the “man” who is being assaulted. The dangers from which protection is realized are spiritual forces that will unsettle and dislodge the individual without proper protection. They are adversities with which the individual cannot successfully contend of himself.

As used in these Scriptures, a “covert” is “a covering, shelter, hiding place, secret place” (STRONG’S). Several ideas are wrapped up in this definition. First, the covert itself is a secret place, known only to those to whom it has been revealed. Second, the word itself implies a kind of hiding that hides the identity of the person, so that the enemy stalks past the targeted individual.

The “MAN,” of reference – who will be a covert – is “the Man, Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). Those who are united to Him by faith cannot be spiritually harmed by any of the above dangers – storm, rain, and tempest. In Him they are “not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation” (I Thess. 5:9). Jesus is also perceived to be a protective “covert” from the impending wrath of God, which shall be poured out upon the wicked “without mixture” (Rev. 14:10).

It is also written, “. . . he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (I John 5:18). Those who are “born of God” (I John 2:29) “keep” themselves by hiding in Christ – taking refuge in the “covert” God has provided for the soul. In the words of Solomon, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is

safe" (Prov 18:10).

Hiding in Jesus is accomplished when the believer voluntarily dies to the course of this world, choosing to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” as directed by God’s grace (Titus 2:12). That amounts to the rejection of any help or assistance offered by the world. As it is written, “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Stated another way, Paul wrote, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14). The truth of the matter is that no man flees to Christ (Heb 6:18) who has not abandoned the ship of “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). As long as the world is perceived as a valid resource for the soul, Jesus will be ignored – and, if Jesus is, in fact, being ignored, it is only because the one ignoring him loves the world. Such a person regards his life as his own, and does not perceive the fact that he has been bought with a price, and is not his own (1 Cor 6:19-20).

The safety of the COVERT causes the redeemed to properly consider Jesus as “precious” (1 Pet 2:7). Where Jesus is not considered “precious” He is easily ignored, His commandments are forgotten, and the sacrifice He made when He “offered Himself without spot to God” (Heb 9:14) is despised.

It must be recognized that even though a person is vigilant, alert, wise, and with understanding, yet without the COVERT, he would still be destroyed by adversity.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 18

THE AGES TO COME

"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7).

From a broad perspective, there are two basic sets of ages. 1. All time from the beginning of creation until the enthronement of Christ. These ages were characterized by an obscuring of God's plan to reconcile man to Himself through Jesus Christ—i.e. “. . . (the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:5). “Even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to the saints” (Col. 1:26).

All ages from the inauguration of the new covenant forward. “Unto Him [God] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Eph. 3:21). These latter “ages” also have two parts; the current “day of salvation,” and the boundless horizon of the future. “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7). The “ages to come” are also addressed by the intriguing words, “world without end.” It is this collection of “ages” that is the subject of this section.

ETERNITY

God's purpose concerns eternity. “Eternity” is not a concept to be discerned through etymology. No human language has an appropriate word for eternity, for it is a concept that reaches beyond the border of human experience. Only revelation can bring appropriate clarity to this word.

Eternity is the realm inhabited by God: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth ETERNITY" (Isa 57:15), and from whence the Lord Jesus came: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from EVERLASTING." (Micah 5:2). We are “taught of God” (John 6:45) to identify Him with boundlessness; “. . . even from EVERLASTING to EVERLASTING, Thou art God” (Psa. 90:2). His Kingdom is also to be

so considered; “For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, FOREVER” (Matt. 6:13). Time, as we know it, is but an interlude during which God’s wisdom and grace are being demonstrated to heavenly intelligences: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10).

Eternity is woven throughout every aspect of salvation. Redemption may only be comprehended within the context of eternity! The primary gift provided for men through Jesus is life – “ETERNAL life” (Rom. 6:23; I John 2:25). God’s purpose in Christ is “ETERNAL” (Eph. 3:11). His salvation is said to be “with ETERNAL glory” (I Tim. 2:10), and He has obtained “ETERNAL redemption” for us (Heb. 5:9). The object for which the saints long is an “ETERNAL inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). The consolation generated by a reception of the Gospel is an “EVERLASTING” one (2 Thess. 2:16).

The judgment of all men will have eternal consequence: thus is it called “ETERNAL judgment” (Heb. 6:2). Even the punishment of the wicked is identified with eternity. Sodom and Gomorrah, we are apprised, “suffered the vengeance of ETERNAL life” (Jude 7). The wicked shall be punished with “EVERLASTING destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9), elsewhere called “EVERLASTING fire” (Matt. 18:8) and “EVERLASTING punishment” (Matt. 18:25).

The “ages to come” is a term which makes eternity more comprehensible to men in the flesh. It represents eternity from the standpoint of progression; upward and onward, so to speak. The world to come” (Heb. 2:5) perceives eternity from the standpoint of the environment. In both cases, there is obvious preeminence. True issues are ETERNAL issues! Temporal matters are always secondary, and tend to distract from the more critical and central issues of eternity.

The eternal ages will be marked by a continued centrality of Jesus. He shall remain the central One into which all is gathered. This is evidenced by numerous glimpses into the “EVERLASTING Kingdom,” given by

revelation (Dan. 4:3; 7:27; Eph 1:10; 2 Pet. 1:11).

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 19

HIS CONFESSION OF THE SAINTS

The participation of the saints in the "ages to come" will commence by Jesus' acknowledgment of them before God. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven" (Matt 10:32). Luke records, "Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8).

The confession to the Father will include the words, "And again, I will put My trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me" (Heb 2:13). The confession to the holy angels will be in order that he might "send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt 24:31). Again, it is written to the churches, "'He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels" (Rev 3:5).

Those who were not ashamed to identify themselves with God's Son in this world, will enjoy His acknowledgment of them before His "God and Father," and the holy angels as well. To confirm that this will not only happen, but that it is a Divine propensity, Malachi records God's unabashed acknowledgment of His people: "'Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared

the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal 3:16-17).

The "children of God" (Gal. 3:20; I John 3:10; 5:2) are never contemplated independently of Christ. They owe their present identity as "children" or "sons" to their unity with the "only begotten Son." While they are in this world, they are totally dependent upon Him. He is their Shepherd (John 10:11,14), Intercessor (Rom 8:23; Heb 7:25), and Keeper (John 17:12). He is their life (Col 3:4), their Teacher (Eph 4:10-21; 1 John 5:20, and their "hope" (1 Tim 1:1). They confess Him to be their Lord as well (Rom 10:9).

However, Christ confessing us is quite another matter. No one will dwell forever with the Lord who is not confessed by Him to the Father and the angels. Conversely, no one He confesses will be cast from His presence. Insightful people live to hear that confession, and there is nothing that is required of them that they will not do to obtain it.

The lofty position to which believers are called involves an heirship of "all things" (I Cor. 3:21). They are called the "heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him" (James 2:5), and "heirs of God" (Rom. 8:17). The connection of their heirship with eternity is seen in the summary statement of the Apostle: "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

The centrality of Jesus in our inheritance is apparent. Those who are "sons" are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). They have been called into an eternal participation with Jesus, whom God has "appointed the Heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). No reward, however small or large, will be separate from Him!

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 1:18-19; 2:9)

Chapter 20

CONCLUSION

God's "eternal purpose," at all points and from every perspective, revolves around Jesus. Man's involvement in that purpose begins as he, by faith, embraces the Son. It continues as he maintains fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9), and it will be consummated in an uninterrupted union with Him as a joint heir (Rom 8:17). The process in which the saved are involved while they are on earth is that of being conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 8:29-30).

Our identify with Christ is very real, and very critical. Through the Holy Spirit, provisions have been made for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. As it is written, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:16-17). The "hope of glory," or the expectation of being forever with the Lord, is described as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

Further, in salvation God puts us into Christ: "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30, NASB). Not only are we made righteous, sanctified, and redeemed in Him, He is "our life" (Col 3:4), and becomes the Source of the "fruit" that is required to be found in us: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:5-6). No Scripturally informed person questions the fact that these words are in Scripture – embalmed in print, as it were, to assure us of the facts that are inherent in salvation.

However, the modern church has not done well in translating these words

into life by becoming living epistles (2 Cor 3:3). A significant percentage of modern ministers and teachers have spent an inordinate amount of time explaining why professed Christians are not what they ought to be. Some have taught that sinful proclivities are in their genetic makeup, and cannot be overcome without the assistance of some recovery program. Others say Christ's are sinners like everyone else – it is just that they are forgiven. Still others present God as having been changed by Christ's sacrifice, so that He can more easily tolerate sin in His children, treating them kindly or graciously, even when they deliberately stumble around in the dark.

Counseling is now one of the premier activities in the nominal church. Christian Colleges even offer degrees in this pseudo-profession, and the position has been added to nearly every large church staff. This is religious man's way of addressing the sin problem, and it is a stench in the nostrils of God. The reason for this circumstance is that it ignores Jesus, who is the very real and appointed Savior from sin. If Jesus cannot bring a cessation of the practice of sin, how can it be established that He is a "Savior?" If He cannot equip those with whom He is identified to be overcomers, triumphing over the wicked One, how can He be called "Lord?" If the life of God cannot be expressed in the saved ones, how can Jesus be "the Vine?" How can it be established that Jesus has "bruised" the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15) and "destroyed" the devil (Heb 9:14), if Satan still has His way in those who have been "joined unto the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17)? If there is not some noticeable advancement toward heaven, how can we know that Jesus is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10)?

Let it be clear, if Jesus is not central in the life of the professing Christian, He is not at work for good within that person. Jesus does not perform His ministry from the periphery of life. He is not intended to be in the background of life. God has exalted Him, and He has no effective ministry for good where He is not perceived as preeminent. That is simply the way things are.