

The background of the cover is a watercolor painting. It depicts a landscape at either dawn or dusk. The sky is filled with soft, blended colors of yellow, orange, and grey, with a bright, glowing light source behind a layer of clouds. Several birds are shown in flight, their dark silhouettes contrasting against the lighter sky. Below the sky, a range of mountains or hills is rendered in earthy tones of brown, tan, and green. In the foreground, a body of water reflects the colors of the sky, with a prominent vertical streak of bright yellow and orange light extending from the horizon down to the water's surface. The overall style is soft and atmospheric, characteristic of watercolor art.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

Dale Rumble, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

When a believer has been truly captivated by the attributes of Christ, such as His character, authority, power, headship, mercy, love, etc., Christ becomes central in his life. This affects how we relate to Him, how we fellowship and build our lives together with those of like faith, and how we proclaim Him to the world.

While the centrality of Christ may well be real to me as an individual, its greater significance is how it applies to the church. Christ must have *first place in everything* if the church is to be a spiritual organism and not just a religious organization.

It would require volumes of books to fully document the greatness of Christ. It is the purpose of this tract to briefly present the following twelve bodies of truth to introduce the subject of His centrality. One reason for selecting these particular truths is their importance in the restoration of the church, a work of God that is taking place today.

(Selected words in scriptures have been highlighted for emphasis.)

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

In His ministry on earth Jesus referred to himself as “the Son of Man” more frequently than by any other name. Why was His humanity so important?

I cannot prove it, but I suspect that when God threw Satan out of His presence in heaven, He said to him, “I am going to create man from the dirt of the earth to replace you.”

The justice of God was expressed to man by the following truth: “the soul that sins shall die.” By the sin of Adam, all mankind entered into spiritual death and alienation from God.

This fall was foreknown by God, and the humanity of Jesus was essential in His divine plan and purpose of redemption. The mercy of God could only remove the curse of death if a perfect man, one who had lived an absolutely sinless life, would of his own will, offer his perfect life in death as payment for the sin of mankind. This transaction is the good news of the

gospel. When sinners accept this truth by faith, the justice of God is satisfied, and they become His sons.

The plan of salvation was birthed in the Father heart of God; it was fulfilled by His only begotten Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

*For there is one God, and **one mediator** also between God and man, **the man Christ Jesus.** (1 Timothy 2:5)*

When Jesus came to earth as the Christ, He was both God and man. He willingly came to give up His perfect human life in a horrific crucifixion to provide atonement for lost man, His humanity being essential to the plan of salvation. The gospel of Christ declares that our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, was *altogether paid for* in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ¹! Man can contribute *nothing*; we simply repent and believe in Him!

Because Jesus experienced, as a man, all the persecution, temptation, tribulation, testing and suffering that we may endure in our lifetime, He is able to understand and have compassion on us as our perfect high priest and to intercede for us. We receive grace and find mercy to help in times of need. Christ is glorified when we daily come boldly to the throne of grace in prayer.

The centrality of Christ is obscured when man adds to the Lord's cross any religious work that he considers necessary for his salvation. Nothing can be added to the finished work of Christ! We are saved by grace, through faith, not by works.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The blood of Christ is the *only* agent under heaven that can cleanse away the sins of mankind. The importance of blood is revealed in the following scripture:

***For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.** (Leviticus 17:11)*

Sins in the Old Testament were only covered by the blood of sacrificial animals. These were a type that pointed Israel toward the future day when Messiah would become their Savior by the sacrifice of Himself as the Lamb of God to forgive and remember their sins no more.

Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefa-

thers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:17-18)

The blood line of Jesus was established when the virgin Mary was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit. His blood was the blood of God.

It is interesting to note that the human genealogy of Jesus, from Joseph to Adam, does not include Moses (Matthew 1:1-16). There is no relationship between the law of Moses and the blood sacrifice of God's Son. Legalism hinders the preeminence of Christ.

The blood must always be kept prominent in the teaching emphasis of the church to ensure the centrality of Christ. This is especially true in times of spiritual warfare.

And they (believers) overcame him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. (Revelation 12:11)

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST

The root of God's salvation plan in Christ is the promise that He made to Abraham concerning his seed. Abraham believed the promise, and on the basis of his faith, God imputed righteousness to him (Galatians 3:6-8).

Abraham was then required to take upon himself a seal that testified of his God-given righteousness; this seal was physical circumcision.

. . . and he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them. (Romans 4:11)

The Abrahamic covenant foreshadowed New Testament salvation in the following sense:

- Jesus Christ is the seed promised by God to Abraham, in whom all the nations would be blessed.
- We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and God imputes righteousness to us based on our faith.
- We are then required to take a seal upon ourselves that testifies of our right standing with God. This seal is heart circumcision received through our obedience in water baptism, a truth that is often neglected today.

. . . and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)

*But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit . . .** (Romans 2:29)*

By faith in the work of the Holy Spirit, when we are baptized, we arise from the waters to walk in newness of life.

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life . . . **Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. (Romans 6:4-6)***

Our sins have been washed away by the blood shed by Christ on His cross; our hearts are circumcised by the Holy Spirit in water baptism so that, by faith, we begin to walk in righteousness. Our faith is expressed as follows:

*Even so **consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. (Romans 6:11)***

The gospel is not simply that Christ died for our sins; it is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The gospel has a threefold testimony:

For there are three that bear testimony: the Spirit (new life), and the water (baptism), and the blood (atonement); and the three are in agreement. (1 John 5:7-8)

The centrality of Christ is concealed if water baptism is presented as an optional choice to a new believer; we are *commanded* to be water baptized (Acts 2:38). To walk in newness of life after baptism glorifies Christ. It is our walk in righteousness, not simply the act of baptism, that honors Christ.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

An absolutely necessary truth, to manifest the centrality of Christ, is to build one's personal and church life on the foundation that Jesus is God. Any doctrine that teaches Jesus is a lesser God than His Father is outright heresy! Jesus is co-eternal with His Father and possesses absolute God-

head. Because of this truth, and the fact that Father and Son rule with the same will, scripture is adamant on the oneness of God.²

*See now that I, I am He, **and there is no god besides Me** (Deuteronomy 32:39)*

*. . . before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. **I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me.** (Isaiah 43:10-11)*

*. . . **for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning** (Isaiah 46:9-10)*

*For **in Him (Jesus) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.** (Colossians 2:9)*

*He is the **image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.** (Colossians 1:15)*

*And **He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power** (Hebrews 1:3)*

*But of the Son He (the Father) says, “**Your throne, O God is forever and ever**” (Hebrews 1:8)*

We embrace the centrality of Christ when we build our faith on His oneness with the Father. To know Him is to know the Father..

*I and the Father are **one.** (John 10:30)*

Jesus came to earth as a man. In fact He was both God and man. His physical appearance was like an average human being, while the Father’s appearance is so glorious that no man could look upon Him and live. Their oneness had nothing to do with appearance, it had to do with character, will, and purpose. Jesus came to earth to reveal His Father to mankind, not just to die a sacrificial death, but also, in His day by day conduct, to reveal the Father.

The divinity of Christ is essential for the church to be a spiritual organism. His divinity was the open door for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that when the Spirit would come to the disciples, He would guide them into all truth, He would glorify Christ and show them things to come. He would empower them and lead them into new dimensions of prayer and worship. True spiritual worship is perhaps the most precious offering that one can give to exalt Christ.

The Holy Spirit has brought into the church the fivefold ministries of Ephesians 4:11, the nine spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, and the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. He became the life-bond that unites individual believers together in the body of Christ. We glorify Christ when we are led by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

A church that operates outside these provisions of the Holy Spirit is greatly limited in expressing the centrality of Jesus.

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

An essential truth for all proclamations and ministries in the church is to recognize that Jesus possesses all authority in both heaven and earth.

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, “**All authority has been given to Me, in heaven and on earth.**” (Matthew 28:18)*

We believers are to seek the will of God for our life and service. Once we discover what is expected of us, we are confronted with our human weakness on the one hand, while on the other hand, we have access to the authority of Christ. By God’s grace we learn how to move in the authority which is invested in His name.

*Whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus** (Colossians 3:17)*

Scriptures are rich with many episodes where believers cast out demons, healed the sick and did many other miracles, all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The name, “Jesus,” in Greek means “Jehovah saves.” Thus the word “Jesus” contains the Father’s name as well as the Son’s. The word “Christ” means “the anointed one”; it refers to the only full, bodily measure of the Holy Spirit. The words Father, Son and Holy Spirit are simply titles, they are *not* names.

“Jesus Christ” is the *one* and *only* name that fully represents the Godhead. It is the name that is above every other name (Philippians 2:9). The authority of His name is most often expressed by the phrase: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Every deed, every proclamation and every decision by the church is to be done in His name. We glorify Christ when we do so in humility and with accountability. Churches mask the centrality of Christ when they act in the authority of an institution or in the title of some minister. Such action is often done by leaders to *control* their followers.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The church is more than an assembly of all persons who have been justified by the grace and mercy of God. Every believer is bonded to Christ by the Holy Spirit who lives in their heart. Through this common identity with Christ, all believers are thereby bonded to each other; they are the body of Christ. A visible reality of the body of Christ is the mutual support and deep care that members have for one another.

They do not constitute an organization based on physical or soulish qualities; they are a *spiritual organism* of which Christ is the head. The church is the body of Christ in both a relational and functional sense.

And He (the Father) put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

What men organize they can lead and direct. The church is an organism of the Holy Spirit that is under the headship of Christ. Members glorify Christ when they move under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christ has central focus in a church that relates and functions as His living body.

The body of Christ is made up of members who differ in personal qualities and spiritual endowments. God has placed each member in the body just as it has pleased Him. God seeks diversity; He builds with living stones, not with bricks. Each believer has a unique place of service.

We believers are members of one another, as well as members of Christ through the essential, spiritual life that joins us together.

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly . . . (Romans 12:5-6)

The body of Christ is not dormant, for inherent in ministry and fellowship, there is spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ. The completed reality of the body of Christ, when everything is under His feet, is described in scripture as “the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The centrality of Christ is dependent upon members in His body being led and anointed by the Holy Spirit. The issue is one of either religion or life. To the extent that man organizes and controls what takes place, church programs will be soulish in nature. Christ has central focus in living expressions of His body.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

There is no greater event in the history of mankind than the cross of Christ. The verbs that describe what took place with the Son of God are not beautiful as expressed by Isaiah 53:5: “pierced through,” “crushed,” “chastened,” and “scourged.” All people are defined by how they respond to the cross of Christ.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The greatness of Christ’s love for us is revealed in His sacrificial death, and His glory is manifest as the principles of His cross are worked into the lives of believers.

A believer who comes before the Lord in the strength of his own ability and knowledge, is one who has not experienced the cross.

*But may it never be that I should boast, except in the **cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (Galatians 6:14-15)*

God can only use broken men. The tool of brokenness is our acceptance of the events and people that He brings into our lives. This is our cross.

The cross of Christ is foundational to all kingdom truth; and equally so it will often be missing when the emphasis is “*user friendly*” gospels.

Christ will be seen when believers truly embrace the cross that He has brought into their lives (1 Peter 1:6-7).

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

The most revealing evidence of the centrality of Christ is the presence of His lordship in day to day affairs of a believer’s life.

Salvation is a transaction in which we give ourselves to Him; we have been bought with a price, and we are no longer our own. He is our Lord.

... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Spiritual gifts may appear immediately after one is saved, but fruits of the Spirit only grow over time as His lordship develops in one's life. Thus, His lordship is not simply the operation of some spiritual miracle or ability. It means that He has power and authority over us. The background of all ministry is Christ-like character in such things as heart attitude, accountability, humility, faithfulness, forgiveness and tolerance. His lordship will be apparent in a church as His character is developed in each believer's life. A godly set of belief requirements for church membership does not replace the Lordship of Christ.

The lordship of Christ is a personal issue. My redemption is a divine balance between God's grace extended to me, and my personal responsibility to obey Him. His lordship in my life depends on my obedience alone. The lordship of Christ in a church requires a commitment of members to personally obey Him.

It is most encouraging to see a brother in Christ, who is anointed by the Holy Spirit, move in faith to heal the sick and cast out demons. The gospel of the kingdom is being demonstrated! However, should such a brother divorce his wife and leave his children, his ungodly behavior contradicts the lordship of Christ. This can only be restored by the local church eldership in stopping the ministry to deal with the character problem. Since the sin is public, the entire assembly should play a role in compassion, intercession and moral support for the goal of seeing the lordship of Christ reestablished.

Church oversight is a ministry which should reflect the character of Christ. Every local expression of the body of Christ requires the oversight of godly men who are above reproach in their personal and family lives. A necessary foundation for any church, that seeks the glory of Christ, is a group of righteous overseers who, as God's stewards, walk together under the lordship of Christ in their trust, accountability and ministry grace (Titus 1:5-9).

The lordship of Christ will certainly not be visible in a church where every member is free to go his or her own way.

THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

The lordship of Christ applies to each individual believer. The headship of Christ, on the other hand, applies to the collective whole of the church. Indeed, Christ is head over everything that pertains to the church. The initiation of all ministry, the call of each believer, and all decisions in government and outreach are to have their source in the headship of Christ.

Thus, the headship of Christ requires each believer to be equipped to serve and free to move in service as the Spirit leads (Ephesians 1:20-23).

I believe that the headship of Christ is the greatest need in the church today. The control of man has become increasingly more apparent than the authority of Christ; “user friendly” gospels, “easy grace” and the charisma of ministers have replaced the headship of Christ in many churches.³

This is particularly evident in the oversight of an assembly. To ensure that His will would be known, the Lord designed the church to have a collegial group of men in the role of oversight. This requires the men to wait on God until a consensus is reached; a group solidarity in opinion for divine direction.

Overseers are defined in scripture by two Greek words, “Episkopos,” meaning “overseer” (which points to their function), and “Presbuteros,” meaning “elders” (which point to their maturity). Qualities that define overseers are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-11 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. A major hindrance to the headship of Christ today is the role of hierarchical oversight by men.

It was the loss of the headship of Christ by the early church that initially led the way into error, and finally into the great apostasy.

The first apostles passed away during a time of much heresy. Instead of seeking the headship of Christ, as revealed by the Holy Spirit through apostolic men, the scriptures and overseers, these church fathers, led by Ignatius, decided to select one overseer to make all decisions for a church. They defined his title as the “bishop.” He made all final decisions on procedural and spiritual issues. He possessed supreme authority.

The following quotation is taken from “THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS” by Lightfoot, Harmer and Holmes, pp 80, 81.

While Ignatius’s church may have had a threefold ministry that included deacons and elders, it is the bishop who is constitutive of the church: where he is, the church is. Any activity or service that takes place, without either his presence or permission, has no validity.

In the apostasy that developed, the bishop was regarded, in a very real sense, as the Lord Himself. The introduction of this office was simply a first step in introducing other levels of hierarchical human authority in religious institutions.

The centrality of Christ in the church will always be greatly limited until His headship is restored.

THE APOSTLESHIP OF CHRIST

An apostle is one who has been sent out on a mission⁴ The significance of an apostle depends upon who does the sending. The Lord Jesus was sent from His Father to earth to accomplish primarily two missions:

1. He was sent to be the apostle of our confession of allegiance to Him as Savior and Lord.

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, **consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.** (Hebrews 3:1)*

2. Christ was sent to be Son over the house that God is building with the living stones of believers. He is the foundational cornerstone for the church.

... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

Just as the Father sent forth His Son to be an apostle, so Jesus sent His disciples out as apostles to accomplish the same mission through preaching the gospel to win confessions of faith by the lost, and to build His Father's house (Hebrews 3:6).

*So Jesus said to them (the disciples) again, "Peace be with you; **as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**" (John 20:21)*

Jesus is the cornerstone for our faith, and He is the foundation for Father's house, the church.

The mission of Christ is evidenced by His apostolicity in the gospel and how He is building His church. We are living in days, that since the reformation, have seen many truths restored to the church. This phenomenon of restoration will continue until it is complete and Christ returns (Acts 3:19-21).

There is an immediate need today in the body of Christ for valid apostles; not for men who build believers around their own ministry for the purpose of control, but for men who, as bond-slaves of Christ, will lay down their lives to promote *His apostleship*.

One truth will be manifested by true apostles, and it is a truth that must be present. These men will understand and build local churches that reveal the headship of Christ, the Apostle.

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

One of the greatest promises in the word of God is the following verse of scripture:

*Looking for the blessed hope and **the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.** (Titus 2:13)*

The day when Christ returns is called “the day of the Lord.” It will be a time when no man, saint or sinner, can deny the centrality of Christ, for He will return in all of His glory.

It is also the day when believers will be caught up to meet Him in the air, to receive new eternal bodies like unto His glorious body. *Christ will be central in everything that takes place.* It is also the time when He will judge the nations.

The days before His return will be a time of harvest and a time of preparation. Christ will become more central in the lives of many who understand what is taking place. There will be great darkness among nations, but the glory of God will arise on His church. Tribulation, persecution, trials and even martyrdom will help prepare the church for His return. There will be a falling away in liberal churches, but a great ingathering from many nations who have only known spiritual darkness.

*This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, **and then the end shall come.** (Matthew 24:14)*

During this time of tribulation, the church will regain the life and structure of the early church; Jesus will become more real in body life, and the control of man will slowly disappear. It will be a time of spiritual warfare and the man of lawlessness will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5).

As the presence of Christ grows in the life of the church, the distinction between good and bad will become more apparent. What is morally correct will replace what is politically correct. In the church there will be a clear separation of what is soulish from what is spiritual. The end result will see the centrality of Christ restored.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

The Greek word “Doxa,” meaning “glory,” defines glory to be an expression of the acts and nature of God as He reveals Himself to us, or as He is revealed through the character and acts of Christ. Thus, God’s glory

expresses His character as seen and understood by mankind. We realize that the preeminence of Christ will be based on His revealed glory.

When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God replied that He would pass by Moses and declare His name and all of His goodness, but no man could look upon His face and live (Exodus 33:18-23). The Lord then passed by Moses and proclaimed the following seven virtues to him: *compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, merciful, truthful, forgiving and just* (Exodus 34:6-7). One can see how these qualities collectively define the love of God.

The life and deeds of Jesus on earth always pointed people to the glory and love of His Father. This was true even when the people had closed hearts and didn't understand Him. His teaching and miracles always invited them to believe and partake of a complete wholeness in Him as the Son of God. The objective of every goal, ministry or proclamation in the church is to glorify Christ, to give Him center place in the assembly.

Wherever churches respond in faith, and their believers practice and build on the virtues listed in Exodus 34, the righteousness of Christ will be seen. This cannot happen through adherence to the Law; only through "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." The key issue is glory, and Christ in us is our hope of glory. When He returns, every eye will see His glory. He truly will have center stage!

CONCLUSION

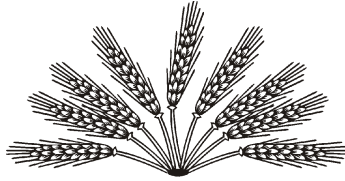
When an unsaved person hears and responds to the gospel, the forgiveness of his sins, the hope of eternal life and the knowledge that God loves him, fills his heart. Jesus has center focus in his life. As he receives new truths and spiritual experiences, his heart relationship with Jesus becomes greater.

Should he encounter and receive ministry that is a blend of religious tradition and uninspired theology, Jesus can slowly become more of a historical part of his life rather than an intimate friend and Lord. He may be very religious, but Jesus is no longer the center of his life.

The same phenomenon is also true for church life. Every Christian church begins with a sincere desire to proclaim and manifest the Person and work of Christ as it is recorded in the Bible. However, unless Christ has been given central focus by believers in laying the foundation of the church, in defining the vision of the assembly, in establishing the oversight, and in equipping and training disciples, what can result is a religious organization with human oversight and goals.

The twelve bodies of truth that we have briefly examined are guidelines to prevent this from happening by keeping Jesus at the center of *all* church life. After all, the church belongs to Him!

In these days of growing darkness in the world, God's answer is to bring forth the glory of His Son on a restored church and gather in a final, great harvest. These events will establish the centrality of Christ.



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