

Christ-Centeredness and Current Challenges

The Bible and Big Ideas

Phil 1:12-23

- What you are passionate about?

Phil 1:21 “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

- The Bible is not simply a manual for how to act.
- Its truth penetrates to the core beliefs that drive everything in our lives – our thoughts, words, and actions.
- It’s not just the philosophers who live out of a framework of ideas.

2 Cor 10:5 “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Challenges to Christ-Centeredness

Pop evangelicalism: “Be a better you.”

- Enter: the “gospel” of feeling better and rising higher.

“Indeed, there are mornings when I wake up and think that it’s already over, and that the church in the West survives more by sheer force of personality, by hype and by marketing ploys than by any higher power. We need to grasp once again who God is in his fullness ... we need teaching and worship which gives full-orbed expression to these things – and this will only come when we in the West grow up, ditch the designer gods we build from our pick ‘n mix Bible where consumer, not Creator, is king, and give the whole Bible its proper place in our lives, thinking and worship. Think truncated [abridged, reduced] thoughts about God and you’ll get a truncated God.”

-Carl Trueman, *The Wages of Spin*, p.168

- As important as experience *is* in our testimony; it must not be confused w/ the gospel.

“None of this should be read as an attack on Christian experience. It is simply to point out that such experience is the result of the gospel, not the content of the gospel. To claim otherwise is to open the door to relativism. Once the gospel starts being presented primarily as that which brings such-and-such benefits, be they freedom from alcohol [etc.] ... the distinctive particularity of Christianity is lost. Islam too gives people self-respect, cleans up neighborhoods, gives a sense of purpose; self-help programs have brought many back from the brink of self-destruction to decent lives; and, while Christianity gives me a sense of meaning and worth, so I believe, does ferret-breeding for some people. So what have I to say to the perfectly content ferret breeder? Not a lot, if Christianity is primarily about feelings, whether of satisfaction, happiness or otherwise. I have Jesus; they breed ferrets. Result in both cases: happiness. So what’s the difference? The difference, of course, lies not in the experienced effect but in the cosmic bottom-line: Christ is God acting to save for all eternity; ferrets are good only as temporary distractions from the deeper realities and concerns of life.”

-Carl Trueman, *The Wages of Spin*, p.73

Postmodern spirituality: “Make the world a better place.”

- Things like the crisis in Darfur, the looming potential of global warming, and growing populations of homeless people are the big issues for Jesus-followers to talk about.

Societal evil is the target issue, not my personal guilt before a holy God.

“It began as a change of focus from the Epistles to the Gospels as a way to understand Jesus more profoundly.... ‘We focused on the humanity of Jesus and lost all the categories from church history (Karen Ward).’”

-Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*

Above the noise of cultural captivity

- Over against both pop evangelicalism and trendy postmodernism stands the New Testament witness that everything exists for the glory of God.
- It is not ultimately about your best life now, it is not about spreading peace and promoting human welfare. It's all about Him!

Col 1:16 "For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him and FOR HIM."

Worship or mission: which takes precedence?

- For biblical Christianity, our mission grows out of our worship.
- If you are a Christian, the deepest unity we have is grounded in our knowledge of and faith in God and our experience of salvation through atoning work of Christ.

"Our mission is what gives us purpose, which is what attracts others to us. If we are not bringing justice and transformation to the world, we should ask if we have a right to exist..... Our mission defines us more than our worship." -Andrew Jones, quoted in Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, p.58

- Paul's Christ-centeredness is unpacked in the subsequent portraits of Christ who is seen to be:
 - The coronated King of the Ages, whose Name is above all (Phil 2:5-11)
 - The supreme Treasure of life, whose value relativizes all else. (Phil 3:7)
 - The only Hope for standing as righteous in God's sight (Phil 3:8-9)
 - The One before Whom every knee - including every worshipped human religious leader and gospel-negating spiritual guru - will bow on the consummate day of judgment (2:10-11)

Phil 2:5-11

- The Christ that animates Paul's life and makes death look sweet is a Christ who alone saves and reigns as Lord.

Phil 3:9

- Paul emphasizes his need for the righteousness of Christ – a righteousness received by faith (justification) not acquired by postmodernism's imitation or pop evangelicalism's self-improvement.

“Rooted in the work of N.T. Wright, emerging churches embrace the gospel of the kingdom as revealed in Mark 1:15-16. At the outset of the Gospel narrative, the good news was not that Jesus was to die on the cross to forgive sins but that God had returned and all were invited to participate with him in this new way of life, in this redemption of the world. It is this gospel that the emerging church seeks to recover.”

-Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, p.54

So what?

- Are you discerning about these things? Do you read books with a discerning eye for how this material reflects, ignores, re-prioritizes or alternately undergirds the centrality of Christ and the gospel?

▶ **3 quick test cases:**

Phil 1:15-18

- To the degree that we treasure and contend for the centrality of Christ and the gospel in all of life, we will increasingly feel Paul's sentiment in our experience ... “to me to live is Christ and to die is gain!”