

“Christ Centered – Part 2”
Philippians 1:21; Galatians 2:20
(Preached at Trinity, January 19, 2020)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last week I began a series of sermons on what we call “The Seven Distinctives of our Church.” Several years ago we identified seven distinctives that characterize the identity of our church. They are CHRIST CENTERED, SOUND DOCTRINE, BIBLICAL WORSHIP, EXPOSITORY PREACHING, PERSONAL HOLINESS, LOVING COMMUNITY, and COMMITMENT TO EVANGELISM
2. Our distinctives are both descriptive and prescriptive—what we are and what we are striving to be. Our church like all churches is always changing. There are times these distinctives have shined forth brighter than others. They describe our church, but they are also goals for our church. They provide the standard that we must resolve never to abandon. It isn’t enough that I preach it. It isn’t enough that we display it in print. We must resolve that this is who we are at all costs.
3. The first of our distinctives governs all the others. The same must be true of your personal life. We are first and foremost a church under the reign of Christ. We find our existence in Him. We recognize His ownership of our church and His rule over us. We must be Christ-Centered.
Because of the importance of this topic I’m taking two weeks to cover it. For the other six distinctives we’ll consider one each week.
4. Last week I stressed that Jesus Christ is at the heart of our existence as a church and He is at the heart of our existence as human beings.
 - A. The New Testament church is defined as being Christ-centered. We owe our existence to Him. He is the life-blood of our church. If we lose our passion for Jesus Christ we cease to be a church. This danger must always be on our minds.
 - B. Jesus is also at the heart of our existence as human beings. Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We must find the fullness of life in Christ. Fallen man denies this truth. Instead of living to the glory of Christ they live only for the satisfaction of themselves. Instead of worshipping the Creator they worship the objects of creation.
5. Knowing the infinite importance of being Christ-centered, how does it work out practically for our church and for the lives of our members and their families?

- I. Christ-centered means everything in our life is fixed and focused upon Jesus Christ
Philippians 1:21 NAU - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
Galatians 2:20 NAU - "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."
- A. Christians have been engrafted into Christ
1. We are a part of the Body of Christ
 2. The phrase "in Christ" is used 90 times in the New Testament.
To say that the Christian life is centered upon Christ is simply a statement of Biblical Christianity.
 3. To say our church is Christ-centered is merely a statement that it is comprised of Christians seeking to hold high the supremacy of Christ.
In order for us to be a Christ-centered church we must have Christ-centered members.
 - a. Our church is a unified body, but it is comprised of individual parts. Each part is essential for the health of the whole. Every time we receive a new member the dynamic of our church changes – either for the better or for the worse.
 - b. A church filled with self-centered worldly individuals is not likely to be a Christ-centered church. A church filled with Christians enflamed with love for Christ and a desire for His lordship over everything will be a Christ-centered church.
 4. To be Christ-centered means He is the focus of everything in your life.
Philippians 1:21 NAU - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
 - a. The Heidelberg Catechism published in 1563:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?
A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.
 - b. We enjoy the sweet favor of Christ. I am His and He is mine. We have come to an understanding of the love of God in Christ. A knowledge of this love is overwhelming. It is the essence of our relationship with Him. Paul says the love of Christ controls us.
2 Cor 5:14 NAU - "For the love of Christ controls us"
 - c. The more we know of His love the more our hearts are drawn to Him. He becomes our highest desire, our chief pursuit.
 - d. Being Christ-centered is not looking for ways to insert Him into conversations. Being Christ-centered makes Him the center of everything. If He is the main subject of our lives He *will* become the main subject of our conversations.

- e. Do you see how this controls everything else in our church?
- Our doctrine is sound because it puts Christ on display.
 - Our worship magnifies the splendor of Christ.
 - Our preaching focuses upon the Biblical text with a focus on the Gospel of Christ – we preach Christ and Him crucified.
 - We are committed to personal holiness because Christ is at the center of our lives. We want to reflect Him.
 - We are a loving community because we are the body of Christ.
 - Evangelism is the natural expression of a life centered upon Christ. We want others to know the Christ we love.
5. Christianity demands the lordship of Christ – He is *κύριος*
- a. This is our Christian profession.
Romans 10:9 NAU - "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"
- b. This means we live in service to Him. Service demands submission. Submission does not come easily. It is possible for us to think we are serving Christ when we are actually still satisfying our own desires, maintaining our own agenda. We are doing what we *want* to do rather than what He would have us to do.
- C. Christ-centered means everything we do has an eye on Him
1. Christ becomes greater than satisfying our flesh
Romans 13:14 NAU - "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts."
 2. Christ affects how we view life. Everything is evaluated with an eye upon Him. We ask ourselves, how does this reflect Christ?
 3. Being Christ-centered affects how we order our home. How we raise our children. How husbands and wives interact. Christ is our model, our focus.
Ephesians 5:22 NAU - "Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord."
Ephesians 5:25 NAU - "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church"
Ephesians 6:1 NAU - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."
 4. It affects how we submit to authority
Ephesians 6:5-7 NAU - "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men"
 5. It affects how we make decisions, how we spend our money – it controls how we direct our lives. Everything has an eye towards how it reflects Christ to this world. Everything is measured according to whether or not it pleases Christ.
2 Timothy 2:4 NAU - "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

6. Living is Christ. Our life is Christ. For me to live is Christ. For the lost man, living is me, my life, my desires. All attention is upon me. Look at me. This is the great desire – look at me, my family, my achievements, my life.
The Christ-centered life is wants everything to reflect Him.

III. So, what does a Christ-centered church look like?

- A. It means our members desire their lives to be Christ-centered in the context of the church. The Trinity Church Covenant reflects this.
 1. Each member is committed to his profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
Trinity Church Covenant:
“ . . . **having been led, as I believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and give myself wholly to Him**”
 2. Each member strives to serve for the advancement of our church. Why? Because this is Christ’s church.
Trinity Church Covenant:
“**I promise, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together with this assembly in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality**”
 3. Each member contributes towards the ministry of our church through his tithes and offerings. Why? Because we are interested in the Kingdom of Christ.
Trinity Church Covenant:
“ . . . **to contribute cheerfully and regularly through the tithe for the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all the nations.**”
 4. Each member gives careful attention to his or her attendance. Why? Because my presence is beneficial to my relationship with Christ and because my presence is beneficial to the spiritual growth of my brothers and sisters.
Trinity Church Covenant:
“ . . . **to sustain its worship, ordinances, disciplines and doctrines; to attend its services**”
- B. Being Christ-centered means our church has a single purpose – to hold Christ at the center of everything we do as a church
 1. We recognize that Christ is the Head of the church.
Colossians 1:18 NAU - "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him"
 - a. This means we submit to Him in everything. We are careful to seek Him in every decision. It means we recognize everything we do must reflect Him.

- b. John Murray – “The church is the church of Christ. It is subject to him, derives its faith from him, owes obedience to him, performs the functions prescribed by him, restricts itself to the sphere appointed by him and advances his glory”¹
 - 2. Christ is central in what we do. Everything is done with an eye upon Christ. All of our teaching, our unity as a congregation, our labor in evangelism – all of it reflects Christ as the center of everything at Trinity.
 - 3. Everything about Trinity should seek to proclaim Christ to the world
 - a. Our reputation – our faith, our testimony, our worship all reflects Christ.
 - b. Even our buildings and grounds should reflect the place Christ has in our lives—mowed lawns and trimmed hedges reflect Christ. It is good to leave our Sanctuary in order at the close of the service. It’s good to leave the dining room in order.
 - it reflects our recognition that these are Christ’s buildings.
 - we don’t want anything to negatively reflect upon our Savior.
 - 4. We want our worship to reflect Christ. He is the focus. We seek His presence.
 - 5. Our preaching is designed to point people to Christ.
- C. You should see your membership at Trinity as having the purpose of glorifying Christ.
 - 1. Your personal growth in knowledge and holiness is for the glory of Christ. Peter writes: **2 Peter 3:18 NAU** - "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity."
 - 2. Your service is directed towards His glory – we are serving Christ.
 - 3. Your membership is about Him! Your commitment to your church should reflect your commitment to Christ.
Earl Blackburn wrote in his book, *Jesus Loves the Church and So Should You* – “Why join a church if you do not plan to adhere to its doctrinal beliefs, to faithfully worship with its members, to serve in its ministries, to give to its support, and to pray for its leaders, members, and endeavors? Why join a church if after two weeks, you stop attending and never actively participate in its life? Faithfulness in following Christ demands faithfulness to His visible church. If there is no intention to be faithful and fully committed to the church, there should be no membership.”²

¹ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol.1, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), Page 362.

² Earl Blackburn, *Jesus Loves the Church and So Should You*, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010), Page 122.

Conclusion:

1. As we begin a new year may we take this very seriously. We must be a Christ-centered church. Our very existence depends upon it. I pointed out last week the fearful condition of the Church of Ephesus in Revelation 2
 - A. In many ways they were excellent.

Revelation 2:2 NAU - "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men"

 - a. They were hard working – the word for "toil" is κόπος - "beating of the breast, intense labor united with trouble and toil"
 - b. They were pressing on with perseverance.
 - c. They were concerned about holiness
"you cannot tolerate evil men"
 - B. In spite of all their commendable qualities they had a serious problem. A problem that would threaten their very existence. They had lost their first love. Their passion for Christ had waned.
 - C. This is something we must take very seriously, both as individuals and as a church. If we do not have a passion for Christ everything else is irrelevant.

Revelation 2:5 NAU - "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent."
2. May we be willing to examine ourselves, individually and as a church. If we find ourselves lacking we need to return to our first love.