

Title: What's New?
Text: Colossians 1.28-29; Hebrews 13.17
Theme: Presenting the body "mature in Christ"
Occasion: State of the church address, 2011
Aim: I aim to inform and encourage the church that God has raised up and given elders the responsibility to use the gospel to help every member become mature in Christ.
Prop Stmnt The elders of this church are charged by God (and the congregation) to use the gospel in our lives to help each of us and all of us look more and more like Christ.

This morning, we are going to take a one-week break from our study in Hebrews, so that I may give you an update on the health of the congregation and a look at a couple of things that we will be working on in this coming year. I am still going to have you turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 13.17, but, before I read that verse, I would like to read for you, the first chapter of Colossians.

Read Text(s):

If you go to the doctor for a check-up or physical, he/she usually checks your weight, your pulse, blood pressure, cholesterol and a few other things that can be put onto a chart and measured with objectivity. All of those tests result in numbers and so, whenever we want to measure the success or the health of an organization or event, we default to numbers. Church membership, attendance and offering can provide some information, but they certainly do not provide all the information. And what's more, when Christ does an evaluation of the seven churches, that were located in Asia Minor near the end of the 1st century, his assessment of these churches as recorded in Revelation 2 and 3 says nothing about the number of nickels and noses. We really need to think this through. We are so tempted to measure success the way that our world does. We are tempted to take marketing strategies, sociological data, and organizational philosophies and apply them to the church. Now, sometimes there are things that are helpful, but frankly, there is nothing in all the world that is like the church and can replace the church. But, since we are the people of God, and we live here as foreigners, whose lives point to another country where our true citizenship lies, we must reflect the values of that kingdom. The way a business measures success is not how we measure success. How does God measure success? Obviously, in order to establish a route for the church to follow, we have to know where we are going – right? So, what is the end? What is the goal?

According to Colossians 1.28, the goal for the church is to be presented to God, "mature in Christ." Therefore, the goal of the church is to become like Christ. Our goal is to look like Jesus in our beliefs, in our relationships, in our attitudes, in our conduct, in our words, in our tone of voice, in our faces, in our perseverance, and in our joy. Since that is the goal – how do we get there? How does the verse start?

1. **Proclaiming Christ is the Priority of Ministry** – "Him we proclaim"

A. Christ is the message

He is the image of the invisible God. That is, Christ is the One who has revealed to us what God is like. Since, we are supposed to reflect God; it really helps to know what that looks like.

I have often been guilty, as a dad, of giving my kids exhortation without explanation. In other words, what happens if you tell your son to cut the grass, but you never teach him how to operate the lawn mower?

Christ shows us what God is like so we know what the target is. But, he is also the pre-eminent one (“firstborn of all creation” – v.15) – explain. He is the creator and he is the purpose for creation and the bond of creation. He is also the head of the church and lived, died and was resurrected as both our substitute, and our pattern, but our glorious leader to bring about the reconciliation of all things. Everything revolves around Christ, which is why he is the message. “Him we proclaim” because He is the very heart of Christianity which is reflected in the fact that he is the hero of the Bible.

Charles Spurgeon, faithfully preached and pastored in London, England in the 1800’s was perhaps the finest preacher in modern history. In one of his sermons, he told the story of a young preacher who delivered a sermon one day with a seasoned and respected church leader in attendance. After the service, the young guy asked the older man for his evaluation of the sermon. The old man said that it was “a very poor sermon.” He said that the text was selected well, it was well researched, his arguments, metaphors and delivery were all good, but “there was no Christ in it.” The young man protested by saying that Christ was not in the text. His mentor replied,

Don’t you know, young man, that from every town, and every village, and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London?” “Yes,” said the young man. “Ah!” said the old divine, “and so from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, that is Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you get to a text, to say, ‘Now what is the road to Christ? And then preach a sermon, running along the road towards the great metropolis – Christ. And,” said “I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one; I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there be a savour of Christ in it.”¹

Preaching the Scriptures means that we will proclaim Christ. Beloved, that is such an enormous relief and joy. It is a relief because I do not have to preach my opinions, hoping that they will work, or preach motivational stories that give you a warm fuzzy but starve your soul. I get to preach Christ and we get to teach Christ and share Christ and point to Christ.

Later on in this book, Paul speaks about the mutual ministry that we are to have in the lives of each other. Specifically we are called to bear with one another and forgive each

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Christ Precious to Believers” (March 13, 1859). Accessed online: <http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0242.htm>.

other (3.13) and teach and admonish each other by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. In other words, the church, that is, our relationships to each other are an indispensable part of helping one another and therefore the entire body look like Jesus. But, even the way that we relate to each other is driven by our looking to and listening to Christ. In the middle of that text in chapter three where Paul is speaking about how we minister to each other, he says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” So, let me put this together. Christ is the glue that holds us together. Christ is also the goal. How do we move each other and encourage each other to look like Christ? In order to look like Christ, we have to listen to Christ. That is what preaching is supposed to do. My task on Sunday morning, is preach through the Scriptures, because Christ is the hero of the Bible. We are going to run into him all the time. As we do, we will hear from him, that is, we will learn more about him and learn more what it means to think like him, love like him, be like and react like him. Then, with the word of Christ in us because it is faithfully proclaimed to us, we are then in a position to remind each other of that.

B. Proclaiming Christ is public and private

Preaching Christ over and over (which is an inexhaustible topic, by the way), establishes the conversation for the church. Preaching Christ helps us know how to point to people to Christ. Now, the preaching part is done publicly, but privately, dads, we take this and break it down for our families and speak to them and encourage them with this. (Chapter 4 is full of examples of private ministry to other believers.) And beloved, here is one of the great benefits of this. We know that people who have professed faith in Christ are called Christians and are called to grow. How can we motivate people to grow and mature? Nothing is more motivational to people than showing them Christ and then showing them God’s glorious plan and purpose for them that is accomplished through Christ. Proclaiming Christ helps guard us from being a people who are all about rules and structure. Proclaiming Christ helps us be people who are all about the gospel. Now...

C. Proclaiming Christ involves warning and instruction

When you preach the message of Christ, you will be warned of the seriousness of sin. We need to warn each other of things that will destroy us like immorality, pride, laziness, self-confidence, anger, bitterness, harshness and greed. We need to be aware of these sins that lurk in our hearts and our constantly desiring to master us, and frankly they are stronger than us. That is why we need to be warned about them and instructed how to address them with the gospel of Christ.

D. Proclaiming Christ is a team effort. (church life)

“Him WE proclaim.” 1 Thessalonians 5.14 makes it clear that warning and instructing are part of the responsibilities of the under-shepherds, which is the elders, or pastors (same position). Over and over we see that the church is led by a group of men who serve as representatives of Christ, who are involved in the life of the flock, and who are therefore, accountable to both Christ and the church. No one person can lead a church because no one person has all of the gifts and no one person should have all the responsibility and all

the attention. That is why, God has designed the church to be led by elders, men who are biblically qualified (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). Their primary task is not to run programs. Their primary task is to proclaim Christ so that the church is looking more and more like Christ.

2. **Presenting People Mature in Christ is the result and goal of ministry.**

A. **Christ is the hero and essence of the gospel.**

When you preach Christ, you will preach the gospel. Col. 1.21 speaks of our natural condition. Every single person who is born into this world is born under the curse of sin because of Adam. We are born with a sinful nature. We are born with a spirit of rebellion. We are born with a default program that trusts ourselves and does not trust God. That is why this world is a mess and is only getting messier. We are trying to run our lives and this world by ourselves, when it is God who made us and this world to be run by his rules. But, we have a better idea, so we think. Our sin means that we are alienated (cut off) from God. We are also hostile in mind, which is, our thoughts are naturally at war with God. God says, “You are a sinner” and we get angry. But, when you finally stop and admit that, and acknowledge your sin and look at God and begin to realize how deep of a hole that you are really in, then you are ready to cry out – Help!!! I need to be rescued from my sin. I need a Savior!!! This is the question that many world religions try to answer, but can only come up with rules that attempt to control your behavior. Religious rules, structure and traditions give people a sense of comfort because they feel that at least they are doing something, but rules and structure do not get to our hearts. Look at what Christ has done (1.22). “You (from v.21)...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

The only way for you to be presented as being holy and blameless is to be reconciled to God through Christ. How does that happen? The text says that you are reconciled to God by means of Christ who died for you. Christ literally and physically died on a cross in order to offer up his own life and body as the perfectly infinite payment for your sin. You can offer up your life as the payment for your sin, but it is not good enough.

Mohammed Atta was a young Muslim who grew up with the rules of Islam. Like many of his generation, he went to another country in order to further his education. In his case, he went to Hamburg, Germany. There, he became overwhelmed with all of the liberties that he had not known and became deeply immersed in pornography. The young Atta, knew his guilt, but he did not know the gospel. His guilt nearly drove him insane. His fear of judgment drove him to join a militant faction of the Islamic faith where he was taught that if he died in a jihad, he would go straight to paradise. Mohammed Atta believed that. On September 11, 2001, Mohammed Atta flew the first jet that hit the World Trade Center in New York. For others, it may have been political. For Mohammed it was personal. He sacrificed the lives of others to pay for his own sins. It did not work. His evil deed only compounded his guilt and intensified his judgment. But look at what he knew. He knew that sin was serious. He knew that much. He knew that sin was so

serious that only death could pay for it. The fatal flaw in his theology and in the theology of Islam, and most of the world's religions is the idea that it is my life and death if need be that pays for sin. In the distorted, judgmental bondage of Islam, they teach that the death of others will pay for your sin. In genuine Christianity, we not die for our sins, we do not kill others for our sin we have a King who died for us. We have Savior who redeemed us. We have a Priest who offered himself for us. We have the Son of God who in our place condemned he stood, who sealed our pardon with his blood, who reconciled us, pardoned, us, forgave us, declared us righteous, who sealed us, who keeps us, who guards us, who provides for us, because he loves us like no other! That's the gospel and that is why Christ is the hero and the essence of it!!

B. The gospel is the means by which people come to Christ and are placed in Christ.

When you recognize what Christ has done that for you, and you believe Him and trust in him and stop trusting in yourself, you are then placed "in Christ" (v.28). You have a new position. You are in Christ. That means that are part of the people of God. You are no longer of this world, because you are in Christ. You are viewed by God as being in Christ. You get credit for his life, his death, his resurrection, etc and now you get to put him on display as he deserves, which is why we, the church, the people of God exist to make Christ famous. But, we forget this. We lose sight of this. So, we need to proclaim Christ to each other. And when we do that we discover that...

C. The gospel-driven church is the means by which people grow in Christ.

Beloved, we need more churches like this. We need more healthy, gospel-driven churches, which is why one of our goals as a church is to be part of planting a new church this year. We are just in the beginning stages of this and will be talking with you more about this. But I am asking that you will make this a regular matter of prayer.

Now, this is the part of the flight, where the captain comes on and tells you to put your seats in their upright position, store your luggage in the overhead compartments your beneath the seat in front of you, get your seat belt back on, and fasten your tray table because we are beginning our descent in earnest and are coming to our destination. The point of the flight is to get to your destination. You with me? Now having said that, I risk you flipping off your brain, because you are thinking about the soup selection at Tim Horton's. Instead I tell you that, because all of that, as necessary and important as it was, was prefatory to this.

1 Thessalonians 5.12-13 – and what is their work?

Colossians 1.28 – to present everyone mature in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11.2 – gives us an idea of how personal and important this is.

This is so important that Paul is willing to suffer imprisonment (v.24) and rejoices in his sufferings for the sake of the body! God uses the sacrificial ministry of people like you, and faithful endurance through adversity to help his church look like Christ.

And beloved, when we look like Christ, even in adversity, it is such an enormous encouragement to all of us.

Recently, a member of our church was in a courtroom standing before a judge because this person, had technically broken the law. It was one of those situations where there was no intent; like driving, with your mind on something else and running a stop sign. The law was broken. The person was charged and pled guilty and now the judge had the responsibility of rendering a sentence. The judge invited letters of character to be submitted on this one's behalf, which several people did. There were others who stood with this member in court. So, the judge, obviously moved by the outpouring of support, and spoke of how impressed she was by this and by the testimonies of people in the letters, said to the one charged (and I am paraphrasing), "I do not know you like these people do and wish I did. You are obviously an exemplary person. How do you in light of the person that you are, reconcile that with what you did? This member said, "Your honor, with all due respect to this court, I stand before the Judge of the entire world. And I believe that he has allowed this to happen to allow me to understand what it is like to feel shame for something that you did." This member went on to describe to the judge a situation in their family that needed reconciliation and how God used this, to help this member be more compassionate to that. That judge did not know whether to spit or wind her watch – know what I mean? And while I am delighted to report that the judge rendered about the lightest possible sentence, I am infinitely more delighted to say to you that this member is part of our church and by humility and respect put Christ on display that day in court.

1 Peter 5.1-5
Hebrews 13.17

Why would we do this? After all, this is America, where we are a bunch of rugged individualists who believe that how I live is none of your business – right? We do this because...

3. **Every Member Matters.**

Three times in this one verse, Paul says, (panta anthropon) "every person." It is very clear from the context (Col. 1.1; 2.1) that he is referring to the members of the church in Colossae. Every person who has joined this church has professed faith in Jesus Christ. Has promised to love God, follow his Word, and be committed to this fellowship. But life happens – doesn't it? We lose sight of the goal and forget our promises. We get bitter and self-righteous, or greedy and disillusioned. We become distracted with lesser things and lose our passion for the gospel. If Christ is really the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the creator, the Savior, the Redeemer and the head of the church, then when I am forgetting that and overwhelmed with life's challenges, I desperately need someone to remind me of that.

Therefore, in addition to continuing our calling to be a Christ-centered, and biblically healthy congregation, the elders this year, are working a means by which we can know how every member of the flock is maturing in Christ. When you became a member of this church, you asked us to do that. And though we are not going to do it perfectly, we are going to work on seeing to it that every single member of our flock is encouraged to pursue Christ, to press on with joy, to be faithful in adversity, to look for opportunities to speak the gospel to others, (in short) to look more and more like Christ.