

Christ and the Enemies Within - Dealing with Pride, Discouragement, Depression, and Lust

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I. Introduction

In a conference called The Glorious Christ, it seemed important to have a session devoted to exploring how the glory of Christ affects not only our public ministry, but our personal lives.

As I've had the opportunity to talk to people who serve in music ministry I often people singing about the joy of knowing and following Christ but not living in the good of that joy.

- I know a well known Christian songwriter, producer, and worship leader whose marriage is falling apart and who lives with an internal rage towards God for things not working out.
- A couple years ago, a local worship pastor left behind his wife and kids to pursue and marry another woman.
- A well known pastor recently announced he is in the process of deconstructing his faith, divorcing his wife, and claiming to be alive, awake and surprisingly hopeful.
- I know more than one leader who has sought to deaden life's disappointment and pain through alcohol.

We've all known or heard about worship leaders and pastors who are committing adultery, battling anxiety, or ready to toss it all in. Maybe that's some of us here.

- We sing, "No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand" but live in crippling fear and anxiety about the future.
- We sing, "Who breaks the power of sin and darkness, whose love is mighty and so much stronger, the King of glory," and live in ongoing defeat and condemnation in certain areas of our lives.
- We sing, "My song when enemies surround me, my hope when tides of sorrow rise, my joy when trials are abounding" but there's not much hope or joy in our hearts when our car breaks down, a child walks away from the Lord, or life gets overwhelming.
- We sing, "It is well, it is well with my soul." And it really isn't.

It can seem at times many of us are trying to give Jesus good PR, but don't really believe he can deliver on his promises. We've become comfortable singing or writing about promises we don't really believe any more, a God who only helps other people, and a Savior who doesn't seem to really save.

We're here in this session to proclaim loudly, clearly, and confidently - Jesus can deliver on his promises. All of them. And he really, truly, eternally saves.

No matter what situation, difficulty, or season you find yourself in, I hope to persuade you that:

Our greatest need in life, and especially in our battle against sin, is a personal, genuine, biblically accurate, ever-growing knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Personal - Not simply knowing facts and data about Christ, but actually knowing him, having a relationship with him that involves our minds, emotions, and wills. We have tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

Genuine - Not hypocritical, seeking to impress others, or for our own selfish ends. We can't use Jesus to get to a greater good or benefit. He is the greatest good and the greatest benefit. A genuine relationship is one built on trust, gratefulness, faith, and love.

Biblically accurate - All our experiences of Jesus must be evaluated by the Jesus revealed in the pages of God's Word. As the Spirit is the one who enables us to know Christ experientially, so the Spirit is the One who is behind the words of Scripture. Books like *Jesus Calling*, *The Shack*, and others introduce us to a Jesus who has characteristics of the True Jesus, but fall short of being faithful to what God himself as revealed.

Ever-growing - As there is no end to the glories of Christ, so we can anticipate always having more to discover about him, more to admire, more to be in awe of, more to love, more to worship him for.

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II. Biblical Foundations

Jesus described salvation this way:

"And this is eternal life, **that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ** whom you have sent." (John 17:3, ESV)

Eternal life doesn't describe a time span but a relationship. Jesus doesn't who is a way to life. He IS life.

God's plan has always been to have a people of his own, who would treasure his Son like he does. That's why the Father sent the Son, so that we could join in his love for him.

God the Father infinitely delights in his Son, and wants us to join in the delight.

Jesus said: "O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, **that the love with which you have loved me** may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:25–26, ESV)

What kind of love did the Father have for Jesus? A love of delight, pleasure, and joy.

Transfiguration: "And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." (Mark 9:7, ESV)

"If God's pleasure in the Son becomes our pleasure, then the object of our pleasure, Jesus, will be inexhaustible in personal worth. He will never become boring or disappointing or frustrating. No greater treasure can be conceived than the very son of God." John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, p. 24

That's what we find Paul's attitude to be in his letter to the Philippians. After recounting all the aspects of his life that he would previously counted as valuable and worth boasting about he says:

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—" (Philippians 3:7–9, ESV)

J.I. Packer writes about this passage:

"When Paul says he counts the things he lost *rubbish*, or *dung* (KJV), he means not merely that he does not think of them as having any value, but also that he does not live with them constantly in his mind: what normal person spends his time nostalgically dreaming of manure? Yet this, in effect, is what many of us do." J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 25.

The world is constantly tempting us to dream nostalgically about manure rather than the glory of Christ:

"But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from **a sincere and pure devotion to Christ**." (2 Corinthians 11:3, ESV)

- Ultimately, we are not to be devoted to a doctrine, a theology, a system, a structure, a liturgy, an institution, an experience, or a leader, but to Christ.
- But how quickly we can be drawn away from his infinite glory and greatness to the paltry and pitiful offerings of the world!

The reality is, many of us today are regularly being led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Where do you go when life is hard? Confusing? Painful? Oppressive? Overwhelming?

What or who do you run to for relief? Refuge? Hope? Joy?

III. Principles, Practices, and a Person

A common scenario:

1. We have a problem, challenge, or struggle that affects us emotionally or morally.
2. We try various solutions, we pray, we read our Bibles, we get counsel, we stop doing things, we start doing things.
3. None of those are necessarily wrong.

But it's crucial that we distinguish between principles, practices, and a person.

Unless our solutions are rooted in a "personal, genuine, biblically accurate, ever-growing knowledge of Jesus Christ" we'll find them insufficient, not ultimately satisfying, and they won't necessarily line up with God's purpose for our lives.

Principles, as in general truths, by themselves can seem heady, intellectual, philosophical. They can be argued with. Principles are true for Christians as well as non-Christians.

Practices may work for one person but not work for another. It can be difficult to sustain practices over a long period of time. Failure in maintaining practices can lead to discouragement and no change. Success in maintaining practices can lead to pride and self-sufficiency!

But Jesus is neither a principle, nor does he merely want to change our practices. He wants us to know him.

"The essence of Christianity is neither eliefs nor behavior patterns; it is the communion here and now with Christianity's living founder, the Mediator, Jesus Christ." J.I. Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, p. 65.

Here's the sad truth. In our fight against pride, depression, discouragement, lust, and a host of other sins and challenges, we often run to other solutions and are led astray from **a sincere and pure devotion to Christ**.

IV. Who We're Talking About

Why is Christ so worthy of our attention and devotion? Why is he the answer to our struggles? What makes him so primary in our battles against sin?

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:15–20, ESV)

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs." (Hebrews 1:1–4, ESV)

In Christ we find infinite highness and infinite condescension, infinite justice and infinite grace, infinite glory and lowest humility, infinite majesty and transcendent meekness, deepest reverence towards God and equality with God, infinite worthiness of good and the greatest patience under sufferings of evil, an exceeding spirit of obedience with supreme dominion over heaven and earth, absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation, self-sufficiency and an entire trust and reliance on God. - Jonathan Edwards

The descriptions, ascriptions, qualities, pictures, and names of Christ are so diverse there isn't possibly any condition we find ourselves in that he won't find him to be our Savior, answer, deliverer, comfort, and friend.

V. The Expulsive Power of a New Affection

Many of us know these things to be true about Christ, even admire them, and continue to struggle with ongoing pride, anxiety, depression, lust, anger, envy, and more.

What we need is a stronger, clearer, more detailed, more compelling picture of Christ to replace the affections that we have directed towards other things.

It hasn't worked to be told simply to stop worrying. Stop lusting. Stop being depressed. Stop being anxious.

Thomas Chalmers, in his article, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection," explains why

"It is seldom that any of our tastes are made to disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom, that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning. It may be done by excessive pampering - but it is almost never done by the mere force of mental determination. But what cannot be destroyed, may be dispossessed and one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection of the mind." - Thomas Chalmers

We need a new affection, a new desire, a new perspective. And that affection, that desire, that perspective is meant to be centered on Christ.

"Christ alone makes all other things suddenly vanish. Hence there is nothing that Satan so much endeavors to accomplish as to bring on mists with the view of obscuring Christ, because he knows, that by this means the way is opened up for every kind of falsehood. This, therefore, is the means of retaining, as well as restoring pure doctrine - to place Christ before the view such as he is with all his blessings, that his excellence may be truly perceived." John Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*.

VI. Application

Here are some examples of how a stronger affection for Christ can help us in our battle against sin:

Pride - The root of pride is wanting to be God. It's wanting the praise and glory that God alone deserves. It's believing that we should have everything go our way, all our contributions noticed and applauded, and everyone think well of us. Pride is constantly seeking to be the center of attention.

As we come to know and treasure Christ more we realize Jesus is more worthy of attention, praise, admiration, worship, and love than we are.

"Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped." (Revelation 5:11-14, ESV)

Can you imagine yourself receiving or deserving that kind of praise? All praise is going to be directed towards the Son, for the glory of the Father. That's what we're headed for. Why pursue something that goes in the opposite direction?

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:3–4, ESV)

Our life is no longer about us, but Christ.

Discouragement/anxiety - The root of discouragement, which is similar to anxiety, is trusting in something other than God and having it fail you. Discouragement relates to the present, and anxiety relates to the future. When we're anxious, we anticipate that something or someone, and that may be ourselves, is going to fail us.

As we come to know and treasure Christ more we find someone who is more worthy of trust than we are, or anyone else, and who is also able to rule over all things for our good.

"And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" (Mark 4:37–41, ESV)

Jesus confronted their doubts and fears by pointing to himself.

Depression - Depression is a symptom and can have many roots. But often, depression is a sign that we've hoped in something and it hasn't come to fruition.

Depression often comes from seeking to find joy in something other than Jesus. A preferred outcome, a relationship, financial security, being well thought of, comfort, freedom from trials.

As we come to know and treasure Christ more we find someone else is more worthy of hope and able to give us eternal joy.

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word." (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, ESV)

Who is doing the comforting? Jesus Christ himself. By what means? Eternal comfort and good hope through grace.

And apparently being with Christ makes all our troubles seem light:

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16–18, ESV)

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Lust - Lust tells us that temporary physical pleasure is better than eternal spiritual pleasure. Before we give in to lust we hear, “God will certainly forgive you for that.” After we give in to lust we hear, “God can never forgive you for that.”

As we come to know and treasure Christ more we find someone who is more worthy of seeking pleasure in, endlessly satisfying, and able to free us from the lies of the flesh.

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” (Hebrews 11:24–26, ESV)

Jesus is also the Savior whose precious blood paid for every lustful thought, word, and deed. Fully.

Surpassing worth.

In what ways is Jesus superior to all the things we think will satisfy us?

1. He truly is the greatest good.
2. His glory and goodness can’t be destroyed.
3. His glory and goodness last forever.
4. His power to satisfy never fades.

VII. Come to Him

Jl Packer, 93 years old, and going blind was asked:

What would be your final words to the church? I think I can boil it down to four words: “Glorify Christ every way.”

Our greatest need in life, and especially in our battle against sin, is a personal, genuine, biblically accurate, ever-growing knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But you might be thinking, “I don’t have the strength to do glorify him, to trust him, to run to him!”

You need not hesitate one moment; but may run to him, and cast yourself upon him. You will certainly be graciously and meekly received by him. Though he is a lion, he will only be a lion to your enemies, but he will be a lamb to you. It could not have been conceived, had it not been so in the person of Christ, that there could have been so much in any Savior, that is inviting and tending to encourage sinners to trust in him. Whatever your circumstances are, you need not be afraid to come to such a Savior as this. Be you never so wicked a creature, here is worthiness enough; be you never so poor, and mean, and ignorant a creature, there is no danger of being despised, for though he be so much greater than you, he is also immensely more humble than you. - Jonathan Edwards

- It's a good thing to be overwhelmed by Christ's personal, passionate love for you.
- Take time to consider the fact that Jesus is truly God and truly man, two natures in one person. Somewhere right now he exists in a glorified body, interceding for your soul.
- Meditate on what it will be like to finally see the face of Jesus.
- Allow the thought that Jesus loves you and died for every one of your sins bring you peace and comfort, and a stronger desire to flee from sin and temptation.
- Take time to be humbled by the fearful awesomeness of Jesus Christ.
- Get to know Jesus as the mighty conqueror who will destroy all the works of the evil one with the breath of his mouth when he returns.

“and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8, ESV)

- Always be reading that expound the glories of Christ, especially in the gospel. The Cross of Christ, Valley of Vision, God the Son Incarnate, In my Place Condemned He Stood, The Gospel Primer.
- We cannot fill ourselves too full with the glory of Christ, even in eternity.
- Above all, read God's Word searching for a better view of the majesty, might, and mercy of Jesus.

“Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in His beams. Feel His all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in His almighty arms...Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him. Let the Holy Spirit fill every chamber of your heart; and so there will be no room for folly, or the world, or Satan, or the flesh.” Robert Murray M'Cheyne, *Memoir & Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*. P, 293

And as the Holy Spirit enables us over time to replace idolatrous, sinful, and misguided affections with affection for Christ, we'll be preparing ourselves for the eternal activity of loving, worshiping, and being satisfied in the Savior.

Jonathan Edwards says it this way:

When the saints shall see Christ's glory and exaltation in heaven, it will indeed possess their hearts with the greater admiration and adoring respect, but it will not awe them into any separation, but will serve only to heighten their surprise and joy, when they find Christ condescending to admit them to such intimate access, and so freely and fully communicating himself to them. So that if we choose Christ for our friend and portion, we shall hereafter be so received to him, that there shall be nothing to hinder the fullest enjoyment of him, to the satisfying the utmost cravings of our souls. We may take our full swing at gratifying our spiritual appetite after these holy pleasures. Christ will then say, as in Cant. 5:1. "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly O beloved." And this shall be our entertainment to all eternity! There shall never be any end of this happiness, or any thing to interrupt our enjoyment of it. - Jonathan Edwards