

# Esteeming Christ

It is a most wonderful thing that in our affections we could have esteem for Christ. How marvelous that in our heart and love and feelings there could be esteem for Him, deep regard for Him. When Christ Himself is becoming the object of our attention and everything to us, this is a strong sign of the grace of God operating in us. Esteem for Christ — this is a great thing.

## *What Moses esteemed*

The word “esteem” is used several times in the New Testament. For example, Hebrews 11:26 speaks of Moses “*esteeming* the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked away to the reward.” This verse reveals a comparison. The value of Christ is being compared with the worldly treasures of Egypt, and Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ” greater riches than anything else. The reproach of *Christ* is mentioned in this verse because Christ is the reality of all the types, shadows, and figures in the Old Testament.

In Moses’ experience, he esteemed Christ. Something of Christ was of far greater value to him than the treasures of Egypt. This reveals that Moses was not being forced or persuaded to leave Egypt and its treasures. No, he had an inner esteem for something better. Something better and higher attracted his attention and broke the power of worldly things in his life. He left Egypt without struggle and turmoil due to the attraction of a greater object. The attraction of Christ is the power and force in our lives that deals with everything contrary to God.

Years ago in England, Thomas Chalmers, a minister of the Word, gave a message entitled *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. This title depicts what happened to Moses. The new affection of the reproach of Christ took hold of him and expelled him from Egypt. This reveals that when a new affection for Christ is in us, it has the power to expel everything else.

It was Moses’ esteem for Christ that infused him with the ability to deal with Egypt. Hebrews 11:24 says, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” This indicates there was an ability in Moses that was supplied to him. It was the ability to say “no.” He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He said no to being identified with the world. Why did he say no? Because of what he esteemed. It is this esteem for Christ that is most needed in all our dealings with the world.

The Christian life is not about being outwardly compelled. It is about something getting into your affections. It is a wooing of your heart. It is a winning of your whole being to the loveliness of Christ, to the most glorious revelation of this Person who is greater, sweeter, more attractive, and more excellent than anything. This esteem for Christ is what supplies the power to choose. Moses could refuse because he esteemed.

Verse 25 further describes Moses: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” Who would be so foolish as to choose to be ill-treated with the people of God rather than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin? Only

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someone who esteems something better. Moses' decisive actions were because of what he esteemed.

The factor within Moses that caused him to "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" is found in the last part of verse 26: "He looked away to the reward." The words "He looked away" come from the compound Greek word *apoblepo*. The root word *blepo* is translated "to see" or "to look," and the prefix, *apo*, means "from." Thus it could read, "look away from." So in looking away *to* the reward, Moses was also looking away *from* something. It is a glorious thing when we see that our true reward and prize is God Himself. This sight is the inner factor that causes us to look away from other things. Moses looked away *from* other things *to* the reward. He esteemed something better and higher. This is what the grace of God does in a man.

Then verse 27 says, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Just consider the sight and inner attraction in the life of Moses. What person would do what he did? He was in one of the highest positions in Egypt. He had risen to the top. He had everything — achievement, success, wealth, prestige. But he forsook it all. He made this crucial decision as a result of what was in him. He esteemed as seeing "Him who is invisible."

Years later we see the great power of Moses' esteem for Christ demonstrated in his repeated dealings with Pharaoh. God came to Moses and said, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the LORD: Let My people go" (Exo. 8:1). Yet every time Moses went to Pharaoh, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let God's people go. So it looked like defeat after defeat for Moses. But actually all the hardenings of Pharaoh's heart were just the gaining of momentum for God to be displayed on this earth through all His signs and wonders in order to make His name known (Exo. 7:3; 9:16).

So never be intimidated by disappointment, by defeat. God is only preparing to come back in. When the tide ebbs, it is actually gaining momentum to come back in. We should always consider this when we are discouraged. When your feelings are on the floor, just remind yourself that the Lord's life is really gaining momentum to come back in with a higher enjoyment of resurrection life.

### *The meaning of esteem*

What we esteem is critical in our experience. The Greek word for *esteem* in Hebrews 11:26 is *hegeomai*. This word is translated in various ways in the New

Testament. Matthew 2:6 translates it as "governor." In another place it is translated "ruler," speaking of the rulers of the Jews. In still another place it is translated "leader," referring to the ones taking the lead. Thus, esteem, lead, rule, and govern are all translations of the same Greek word.

By these various words we can see the significance and meaning of *esteem*. It is what has first place. It is what takes the lead. It is what governs. It is what rules in our experience. When we esteem, it means there is something in us that governs us. For example, all of us have had experiences in which what we esteem comes out. What we talk about and what we are enthused about is an indication of what we regard, what we esteem. It is usually what rules us, what governs us. Many times when you talk to someone, you touch what they consider important. What they esteem comes out. For example, they may start talking to you about computers. By their talk you could discern that they are a person who esteems computers.

So what we say in our conversation and what holds our interest is what we esteem. What do we esteem? This is a major question that reveals what is in our heart. Is it our future? Is it our bank account? Is it our material possessions? The Holy Spirit is able to expose in us what we esteem — what governs us, what leads us. At the same time that He exposes, He works in us to so gain us that we would find ourselves esteeming Christ above everything.

### *Losing everything because of esteeming Christ*

Now let us look at Paul's experience in Philippians 3:7-8: <sup>7</sup> "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss on account of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, that I may gain Christ." This testimony of Paul helps us to see what the Spirit does in us and the way the Spirit takes with us in our experience. He is leading us to *count* all things to be loss. *Count* and *esteem* come from the same Greek word that means to calculate, to value something, to regard it in a certain way.

In each of us there is a certain kind of regard, a certain value. Let us consider a practical example. You may be having problems in your relationship with one another as husband and wife. Your feelings about a situation are real. Your views are also very real. What you *think* is real to you. You regard your thought, your feeling, your opinion. You have a deep conviction that rules and

governs you. All of this means that your own thought and feeling have the precedence over Christ. And eventually, because of your views, you have strong reactions, and in those reactions the Lord allows you to end up in death. You end up dry, dead, and without any inward nourishment and supply. It is like you are tumbling helplessly in space without any shoring, without anything to hold on to. This is because you have regarded your reasoning mind, and it had its way.

Then another day comes, and you pass through the same situation again and the same feelings rise up. But this time, because of the Spirit's operation and working, there is a new esteem in you for Christ, a new regard for Him. There is a new respect and appreciation to experience Him rather than have your own way.

### *The ability in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ*

According to Philippians 3:8, Paul could testify in his experience, "I esteem all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." This means there was something about the excellency of the knowledge. What kind of excellency of the knowledge of Christ do we have? We may be down on a lower level trying to carve out our little feeble experience for ourselves. We may be trying to figure it out and make it work. But all the while what we really need — to get us out of every hole — is an expansive vision which Paul describes as "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

There was within Paul something that could be described as the excellency of the knowledge. That means Christ was on Paul's horizon. He had a vision of how unsearchably rich Christ was. Where did he get it? How did he get it? We may ask, How do we get this vision? How do we get something that so supersedes everything else that we just regard all things as loss? I count my attainments, I count my ways, I count my life, as loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. How do we arrive at that state?

In verse 8 Paul continues, "on account of whom." Listen to this: "on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them, esteem them, as refuse, that I may gain Christ." Paul not only counted all things loss, but he also suffered the loss. It is the same in our experience. In a church meeting when we are singing to the Lord or listening to the Word of God, we *count* all things loss. But the next day we may pass through an

experience where we actually *suffer* the loss of all things. That means it is not just a matter of receiving revelation and inspiration in the meetings, but it is also, in our experience, suffering the loss of all things on account of Christ, that we may gain Him.

Paul was a person with something in him that so surpassed the natural, human realm, that he lived with an esteem for Christ, a value for Christ, and a desire to live in Him, to gain Him, to be in Him moment by moment. He knew that every fleeting emotion, even the fear of death, would be just for Christ to be magnified. So when he was in prison he could say, "Whether by life or by death, Christ shall be magnified in my body. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." The supply of the Spirit was for that kind of living (Phil. 1:19-21). All these verses show us what Paul esteemed.

What do we esteem? Where on this earth are there brothers, sisters, young people, couples, and families who esteem Christ? Where are there churches, where are there saints, where is there ministry in which the value system is Christ? where what matters is not my way or your way or their way or anyone's way, but Christ Himself? Who values Christ? Who esteems Christ? Where is Christ — not my doctrine, not my movement, not my denomination, not my emphasis, but Christ? In this universe what else but Christ is worthy of our esteem?

### *The Father's esteem of Christ*

Let us go talk to the Father. Let us refer ourselves to the Father. In Matthew 17 when the Lord was transfigured on the mountain, Peter proposed that they build three tabernacles — one for the Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He was excited about the Law and the Prophets. But the Father interrupted him and said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (v. 5). The Father's esteem in this universe is singular. It is for His Son. The Son is the Father's delight. Just refer yourself to the Father in the Gospels. See what He said both at the Lord's baptism and His transfiguration, those two major points in the Lord's life. Both times the Father gave a quick, brief testimony. It was short and to the point. He did not have anything else to say. He just said, "Hear Him!" This is the Father's esteem of Christ.

The Father has a lot of rich thought, and when His thought comes out, it comes out as Word. In John 1:1 God's thought is translated into Word: "In the beginning was the Word" — singular. This is Christ. He is the

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## Made Sons and Brothers for Fellowship

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*

— 1 John 1:1-4

**I**t is clearly evident that fellowship is the end result of everything mentioned in these verses. It is a fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. But have you ever noticed the sequential order that leads up to and brings forth this fellowship? The first step in this sequential order is *manifestation*. The Word of life was manifested in the Person of Christ. That is, the divine life, the life of God, was made known to man through Christ. When the apostles heard, saw, looked upon, and handled Christ, they heard, saw, looked upon, and handled God Himself. The life of God was manifested through Christ's incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection.

Having been firsthand witnesses of the manifestation of life, the apostles then became reporters. What they saw and heard they boldly declared. Thus, the second step in this sequential order is *declaration*. As good reporters they did not lecture an invented philosophy. They did not propound a new set of religious or ethical teachings. No — reporters are not supposed to do that. Reporters are to declare, in an accurate fashion, all that they were eyewitnesses of. And what were they eyewitnesses of? Christ, the Word of life!

The third step of the sequence in these verses is not explicitly mentioned but is clearly implied. It is the step of *believing*. What the apostles declare must be believed in by those who hear. As John says in his Gospel, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). This is the goal of all preaching — to generate faith. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Thus, the eternal life was *manifested* in Christ, was *declared* by the apostles, and was *believed in* by all God's called ones.

What then is the end result of this sequential order? *Fellowship!* "That you also may have *fellowship* with us; and truly our *fellowship* is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." This is the goal. This is the end result. Why

was the eternal life manifested in Christ? Why did He become a man? Fellowship! Why did the apostles so boldly declare, often at the risk of their own necks, what they heard, saw, looked upon, and handled? Fellowship! Why do we believe? What is the purpose of our salvation? Fellowship!

### *The fellowship of life*

Now we must see that, according to these verses in 1 John, the *kind* of fellowship John is talking about is not just a fellowship between friends. Indeed, this kind of fellowship is deeper than friendship. It is, first, the fellowship of *life*. The eternal life was manifested, declared, believed in, and then *imparted* into us. When life is imparted into us, then we have the fellowship of life. And it is, second, the fellowship of *the Father and the Son*. In other words, God the Father and God the Son have a marvelous fellowship with One Another which is made up of the eternal life flowing between Them in filial love. Now we who have believed in Christ are privileged to join *Their* fellowship. The *same* current of life that flows between the Father and Son has now been extended to us! We are actually participating in the flow of Their eternal life which, as Jesus said, is like rivers of living water (John 7:37-39). Life was first manifested, then declared, then believed in, and finally imparted into us and is now flowing within us.

What does this imply? It implies that we are in a fellowship of life. We are in the fellowship of the Father and Son. We are in a *family* fellowship. Of course, a family consists of those who possess the same life. And because we have all been born of the Spirit and have been regenerated with the Father's life, we are now members of His family. We are the sons of God and the brothers of Christ — and we all have the same life.

This means that what flows between the Father, the Son, and us — the many sons — is life. And this means that what flows between each other, as brothers and sisters in Christ, is life! Those in the business world have something between them — money. Those in political parties have something between them — political causes. Those in college fraternities and sororities have something between them — secret initiation rites and handshakes. But what do we believers have between us? Life! We are all brothers and sisters in Christ because we all possess the same life — the life of the Father. As a result, we have a family fellowship, a fellowship of life.

### *The basis of being made sons and brothers*

Often we Christians take such matters for granted. Being called a "son of God" or a "brother of Christ" becomes

something commonplace and of little meaning. But we must never lose sight of how staggering such facts are. And we must never lose sight of all that the Lord Jesus passed through to bring us to such a position. He became like us, His brothers, in all things, partaking of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14-17). He was perfected in His humanity, learning obedience by the things which He suffered (Heb. 5:8-9). Ultimately, by His death and resurrection, He brought His humanity into glory.

And through this whole process, His goal was to produce many sons. He died on the cross to wash away our sins by His precious blood, and He rose from the dead to impart eternal life into us so that we could be begotten of God. This is why, on the day of His resurrection, He told Mary, "Go to My brothers and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). What anticipation and joy are in His words! "*My brothers.*" "*My Father and your Father.*" Never before had He been able to declare such words. Never before had He been able to announce to His disciples their blessed admittance into the family of God. But now in resurrection, He is able to cleanse them by His blood and to regenerate them by His life so that they could become the many sons and many brothers in God's family.

What a marvelous fact that we are the brothers of Christ! We are not only the friends of Christ, but also His brothers. And having been brought up to such a position, we now have fellowship — a family fellowship! And the Bible reveals that as we fellowship with the Father and the Son day by day, we are being conformed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). We are being led into glory by the One who is already in glory (Heb. 2:9-10). And eventually, our whole being — our spirit, soul, and body — will be fully conformed to Christ. We will be just like Him (1 John 3:1-2). So the Son became like His brothers in all things in order that we, His brothers, could be made like Him. Praise Him!

### *Characteristics of family fellowship*

What characterizes this family fellowship into which we have been called? There are a few characteristics to consider. First, family fellowship is permanent and secure. Friendships can be broken. But being a brother can never be broken. We all know that regardless of how "bad" a certain brother may be, he never ceases to be your brother.

I remember seeing an interview with the brother of an infamous murderer. It was obvious that this man had gone through many years of suffering and pain from being the brother of such a despised person. Yet, at the end of the interview he was asked whether he still loved his brother. With tears in his eyes, he nodded and said, "Regardless of

what he did, he is still my brother and I still love him." Brotherhood can never be broken. Regardless of what we are or do, we can never dissolve brotherhood.

The same principle holds true in the family of God. Once we have been born again, begotten of the Father's life, we can never be unborn. Our position as a brother of Christ and a son of God can never be dissolved. Our salvation is permanent and secure. I may be a naughty child, but I am still a child. I may need the disciplining hand of the Father to spank me, but I will never receive the wrath of God that is reserved for unbelievers. I have the absolute assurance and security that I will never be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:39).

A second characteristic of family fellowship is freedom and ease. Even with the best of friends, we are often careful not to step on any "sensitive toes." But in a family life, we typically do not have such reservations. We are not walking on eggshells. We do not live in an atmosphere of fear, timidity, or trepidation. Rather, we live with much boldness and freedom with the members of our family. Do we realize that this is the nature of our fellowship with the Father and the Son? As Paul declares, "You have not received a spirit of slavery to fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). How wonderful to live in such a fellowship with God — a fellowship with no fear, but with boldness, freedom, confidence, and ease.

A third characteristic of family fellowship is deep affection. John tells us that Christ, as the Son, is always pressing into the bosom of the Father (John 1:18). This reveals to us the deep love that the Son has for the Father. He never ceases to press into the Father. That is the Son's continual motion — into the heart of the Father. Now we must realize that this is His continual motion *within us!* Consider Galatians 4:6 which states that "God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Romans 8:15 says that *we* cry "Abba, Father." But this verse, Galatians 4:6, tells us that *the Son* is in our hearts crying "Abba, Father." For the Son to cry "Abba, Father" means that He is pressing affectionately into the Father. But where is He doing this from? Our hearts! From within us, the Son presses unceasingly into the bosom of the Father.

What does this mean? It means that we should never look to ourselves to find any affection or love toward God. In our flesh, none of us have any inclination toward God. But that's okay — we have Someone within us who is forever loving the Father and pressing into the bosom of the Father. He is in us crying "Abba, Father." Now we can simply merge with Him. We can cry "Abba, Father" with Him and be carried by His love into the Father's bosom. How encouraging! We have a "built-in" love for God within our hearts — His name is Jesus Christ.

— Kirk Eland

(Continued from Page 3)

Word. When the Father spoke, when God talked, He only said one word, and that Word is Christ. Embodied in that one Word is every word that you will ever need to hear. Christ is that Word.

What is God speaking to you? All His thought, intention, and purpose is in Christ. God spoke and out came one word — the (*Logos*) Word, Christ Himself, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. So when you have Him, you have the thought of the Father. You have the intention of the Father. You have Christ as the sum of every thought of God. This is the esteem of the Father concerning His Son.

Dare we esteem any other thing higher than Christ? In our experience and in our fellowship with others may we esteem only Christ. What a precious thing it is to esteem Christ and to have that esteem in our heart. In our affection, in our considerations, in all our deliberations, we regard Him. He governs us. He is the ruler. He is the leader. He has first place practically in our experience.

### *Esteeming our enjoyment of Christ*

We also need to esteem our enjoyment of Christ just as Mary did in the Gospel of Luke. Martha was in her busyness, but Mary chose the better part (10:38-42). Mary sat at the Lord's feet and heard His word. This shows that within her was an esteem for her enjoyment of Christ.

But some of us may be like Martha — we are locomotives dispositionally. We wake up a locomotive. We are in gear from the moment we open our eyes. But the Lord knows that even locomotive dispositions will find the end of the track somewhere. When that day comes, it will no longer be a matter of forcing yourself to be with the Lord. Instead you will say, "I *must* be with the Lord or I cannot live today." I cannot live apart from supply. I cannot live without opening to my God and letting the intimacy of His voice talk to my inward parts. Day by day I need His light to shine and pull down in me attitudes and hidden motives that get exposed in His presence. I have to have that kind of interaction with the Lord in the Word, to let Him process me with His life, to eliminate distracting thoughts out of my mind — condemning thoughts, accusing thoughts — things in me I do not even know are nagging me. So I esteem my time with the Lord. Like Mary, I esteem sitting at His feet.

This is what the Lord desires — those who esteem Him as their first love (Rev. 2:4). You esteem your closet experience, your time when you shut the door to be with Him. You esteem that personal intimacy with the Lord,

because out of it comes His life springing from within you. God is there working from within to supply and energize you.

When we esteem our time with the Lord and our enjoyment of Him in the Word, there is an issue, a result. We know that it was Mary who broke the alabaster box of ointment. It was Mary who anointed the Lord for His burial (John 12:3-7). It was Mary who was able to just pour herself out. Why? Because she esteemed receiving His supply, she esteemed nurturing her appreciation and love to the Lord. She esteemed sitting at His feet, being in His presence. As a result she was able to be the one to pour out upon Him what was precious. Thank God for this esteem of the enjoyment of Christ.

### *Esteeming our experience of Christ*

In Philippians 3:5-6 Paul is recalling all kinds of personal experiences, and in verses 7-8 he esteems it all as loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. Then he continues in verse 8, "I have suffered the loss of all things." The context tells us that the "all things" include Paul's heritage, what was ascribed to him by birth. For example, he calls himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews." This kind of boasting is inbred. It is in our fibers, in our flesh. It is pride. We are all proud of our nationality. Then Paul itemizes all the things he himself achieved — he was a zealous, blameless, law-keeping Pharisee. But now, all these attainments that were gains to Paul, he counted loss on account of Christ.

Because Paul esteemed Christ in his experience, he counted as loss all the things that built up his pride. He suffered the loss of all these things that he might gain Christ and be found in Him. In verse 9 he says, "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is out of the law." That means when others come and find you, how do they find you? When they meet you, do they find you thinking about how wonderful you are? Do they find you trusting in your good week? Or do they find you wallowing in your bad week — with your mind full of cogitations? Paul said that he did not want to be found in any of these good or bad ways. He wanted to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness. He wanted to be found enjoying the righteousness that is a gift out of God. It is this gift of righteousness that frees us from guilt, condemnation, preoccupation, and self-introspection. We are finished with that whole realm when we are occupied with Christ.

Christ was Paul's righteousness. Paul wanted to be

found in Him with that righteousness which comes through faith, that he might know Him. Paul wanted Christ, and Christ alone. He esteemed Christ in such a way that he spoke these kinds of words to sweep through his inner life, to sweep it from all self-trust, self-righteousness, self-confidence, and self-effort. Why? Because he esteemed Christ above everything in his experience.

So when you and I are thinking about ourselves in these self-centered ways, it is another knock at the door to count it loss. Drop it. Lose it. Practically, when you lose something, it happens quickly. Nothing is finished. You just lose something. It got lost. You lost your wallet. What happened? You lost it. In the same way, just lose trying to get yourself together to come up with a righteousness of your own. Just lose it! Oh, what a joy to be out of our self and into Christ, to be found in Him. This is Paul, the brother who esteemed Christ.

### *Esteeming the expression of Christ*

We can also esteem the expression of Christ. Where are there brothers and sisters esteeming the expression of Christ? We find one in the apostle John in Revelation chapter 1. Verse 1 says, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take place.” If we were to read the book of Revelation with our minds only, we would think, “This is the prophecy about all the things coming at the end of the age. And we are going to see how everything is fulfilled here.” That is the way we would read this book.

Although the book of Revelation is a book of prophecy, what does the Holy Spirit esteem in writing this book? The first words are, “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” That is what this book is about. Later it says, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). That means the testimony about Jesus is the heart, the sum and substance, of the prophecy. If you want to touch the heart of the prophecy — the heart of the fulfillment of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven bowls — the testimony of Jesus is the heart. Indeed, the testimony of Jesus is the main point of the book.

Whatever is happening in God’s administration of this universe, all of creation is groaning for Christ to be produced as the Head of His Body, wearing His Body, wearing His members, being glorified in His members (2 Thess. 1:10; Col. 3:4). This is what the book of Revelation is about — it’s about Christ! This is why it is not a small thing what we esteem as a believer. And here John shows us what is worthy of our esteem — the

revelation and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

After John received the revelation in verse 1 of chapter 1, he tells us that he “testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even all things that he saw” (v. 2). Then in verse 9 he says, “I, John, both your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John was there because he esteemed what God esteems — the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Then we find out that the testimony of Jesus Christ is *in* the churches, and is *with* the churches (Rev. 1:2, 4; 22:16-17). There is an esteeming of the expression of Christ in the form of churches throughout the book of Revelation. That is why the Lord is standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (v. 13). Regardless of how bad the condition of the churches is, the Lord is there in the midst of all seven, including the most deceived one, Laodicea. The Laodiceans did not think they had need of anything. They thought they were doing fine. Yet all the time the Lord was outside the door of the church. In a sense, He was not even in their midst. Nevertheless, He was at the door knocking, trying to get in (3:14-22). This shows us that the church life should never be given up regardless of how low its condition is. Whether it is Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea, the Lord desires nothing else in this universe but His people, His gathered ones. So He comes at the beginning of Revelation, and there He walks in the midst of the churches.

If the Lord cannot get everyone, He will get those who have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. It would be wonderful if everyone in the church in Ephesus would repent and give their heart back to their first love. It would be wonderful if the whole church responded. The Lord spoke to everyone in the church, but then He added, “He who has an ear, let him hear.” This is why church history is made up of one little recovery after another, one remnant group after another. In the midst of the outward expression of professing Christianity, there are ones in every generation who hear the voice of the Lord, who hear the call of the Lord and pursue Him.

Some of the outward expression of professing Christianity is dead. Some is institutional. But out of this come those who are the persecuted lot, as Paul said, “They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). And the Lord said, “If the world hates you,

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you know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). This indicates that when the Lord’s life is among a group of believers, on the one hand, there is a glowing testimony; on the other hand, there are attacks that come to try to disintegrate it. This is because the devil hates the expression of Christ. But the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the expression of Christ, the church.

### *The determining factors of our esteeming of Christ*

One of the determining factors of our esteeming of Christ is our knowledge of Christ. Consider Paul’s experience. We all know that he had been a Pharisee. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. This means he knew the Old Testament. He knew it in his Jewish way. But then the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus Road, and he was saved. After preaching for a while, he went into Arabia for about three years (Gal. 1:15-18). No doubt he had his Old Testament with him. He went through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and his eyes were opened to see Christ in a way that he had never seen Him. He received the excellency of the knowledge of Christ by digging into the Word systematically through the Old Testament. He saw Christ everywhere. So later when he was writing to the Ephesians, he could say that he had been sent to proclaim “the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel” (Eph. 3:8). If you read this phrase in the original Greek language, you find that Paul is referring to an Old Testament passage about the good land, the land flowing with milk and honey — with its breadth, its length, its height, and its depth. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ was in Paul because he got into the Word.

Now look at Paul in Acts 28:23. It says, “And once they had appointed a day for him, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he expounded these matters, solemnly testifying of the kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening.” This is why Paul speaks of “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). This knowledge was not just a vague thing to him. Paul had spent time getting into the Old Testament. Now from morning to night, from Genesis, from Exodus — from all the Old Testament books — he opened up Christ and God’s purpose. When you see Christ in this way, when you have the knowledge of Christ, then you esteem Him.

Being in the realm of the Spirit is another determining factor of our esteeming of Christ. When we use our spirit,

there is an esteeming. You and I may not be feeling that excited about the Lord, but the moment we pray, the moment we start to sing, we get filled up in spirit, and our esteem for Christ rises. However, if we live in our soul-life day after day, our esteem for Christ will not be that rich. But the more we live in the spirit — the more the spirit is our source — the more it will affect our esteem for Christ. We will value taking the Lord in a deeper way. We will value the Lord in little details. We will value Him in a greater and finer way when we live in the realm of the Spirit.

What we treasure becomes the factor directing our heart and determining our capacity to esteem Christ. Where your treasure is, there is your heart. Where your treasure is, there is your esteem. You cannot serve two masters. We know it is impossible. That is why our heart has to be single to love Christ. Eventually the evidence of our esteeming of Christ is the supremacy of Christ in our affections. Our one expectancy is Christ in all our living. We are willing to lose everything to gain Him. We value Christ, we regard Him.

“Lord, grant us to have a deep impression. Let this word operate in us to bring us back again and again to Yourself, to keep us focused and occupied with Yourself until eventually we do not have a taste for anything but Christ.” Oh, may the Lord ruin our taste for anything else, so that the only taste we have is for Christ Himself.

This is how God is heading up the universe. This is His government. It is where the emphasis is Christ and Christ alone. And it is where the churches are being headed up to express this one Christ and there is fellowship around the earth. It is where churches everywhere are occupied with the same one thing — Christ. Oh, may our hearts esteem Christ in this way.

— Bill Freeman

## *the Christian*

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