Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus Plus Nothing Equals Everything
Scripture: Colossians 2
Code: 80-329

It seems to me that if I were not a Christian and if I were just out there living in the world, and some well-intentioned person approached me and asked if I would be interested in being a Christian, the first question that I would ask would be, “What does Christianity provide for me? What does Christianity offer?”

And I’m afraid that I might get a whole lot of different answers. It seems to me that there is widespread confusion with regard to those who present themselves as the purveyors of Christianity and its benefits. Just exactly what do you think people assume Christianity offers? Health, wealth, success, peace of mind, a certain level of tranquility, perhaps the promise of a better job, a better career, the fulfillment of your dreams and ambitions and desires, perhaps even everything you can think of and articulate, that would be a fairly common presentation of Christianity.

But I think the overall general sense of Christianity is that it offers you whatever you want. Whatever it is that makes you happy, whatever it is that satisfies you, whatever it is that fulfills your ambitions, your desires and your dreams, that’s what Christianity offers you. Christianity offers to make you everything you really want to be.

That is a very confusing message and a very unbiblical one. It also lays out a complex answer to what should be a very simple answer. In a word, what Christianity offers you is Christ, Jesus Christ, that’s what Christianity offers. That is a very simple, straightforward, one word answer to what has become a very complicated issue. We offer Christ in offering the gospel. The surpassing theme of the Scripture, the surpassing theme of the New Testament, in particular, is Jesus Christ. And in not having Christ, you have nothing. And in having Christ, you have everything.

The writer of Hebrews says that Christ makes us perfect forever. The Apostle Paul in writing his first letter to the Corinthians sums up other significance of having Christ with these words, chapter 1 verse 30, “By His doing, by the work of God, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” All wisdom, all the benefits of wisdom, divine wisdom, all righteousness, all the reality and benefits of righteousness, all sanctification, that is the pursuit of and the attainment to holiness, all redemption including not only our soul redemption but our bodily redemption, all of that is found in Christ. Everything is found in Christ.

In Ephesians 1 we read this, verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” There is little wonder then that the Apostle Paul in that same epistle of 1 Corinthians and that same section in chapter 2 said this, “I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ.” That is our message and our message alone.

Christ is Christianity and He is all there is to offer because He is all that we need.

The Apostle Paul concerned about the Corinthians, deeply concerned about them, as he comes to the end of his second letter to them in chapter 11 says in verse 2, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I’m afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity associated with Christ.”

Christianity is very simple, it is very pure, it is about having Christ, knowing Christ. Paul says in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain.” He says in Philippians chapter 3 that when he saw the glory of Christ, everything else became manure. Verse 8, “More than that, I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things but count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death.” And so he says, “One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal which is the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” What is that? What is the prize when we’re called up? It is to be like Christ. Paul says, “One day I will be like Christ. Until then, my goal is to pursue that Christlikeness.”

We have only one message, and that is Christ. We tell sinners they can have a relationship with Christ and in that relationship with Him, they will receive everything they need, all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. And yet in the name of Christianity, in the name of the gospel, in the name of the church, in the name of evangelism, people are told all kinds of things, promised all kinds of things, sold all kinds of things and in the middle somewhere is, if recognizable, a significantly diminished Christ. Anything that diminishes Jesus Christ is a perverted presentation, it is another gospel, a false gospel.

To understand the centrality of Christ, you could go just about anywhere in the New Testament epistles, but for tonight I want you to look with me at Paul’s letter to the Colossians...Paul’s letter to the Colossians. This entire letter, I think, assumes that the church at Colossae was being beleaguered by people who were trying to convince them that Christ was not enough, that Christ was not sufficient, that they needed more, because this entire letter pounds home the theme of Christ’s complete sufficiency.

You will notice chapter 1, for example, and verse 14. Verse 13 ends, “His beloved Son,” which becomes the antecedent for verse 14, “His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” And who is He? “He is the image of the invisible God, the prototokos, the premiere one of all creation, by Him all things were created both in the heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or rulers, or authorities,” speaking of angelic beings, “all things have been created by Him and for Him and He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the premiere one ever raised from the dead so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything, for it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.”

All what fullness? All the fullness of God. That takes you back to John 1:14, “And the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” He is the everything. He is the all in all. In Him all fullness dwells.

In the second chapter of Colossians and verse 2, the verse ends referring to Christ. Christ, the antecedent then to verse 3, “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.:” Verse 9, “For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.” Verse 10, “In Him you have been made complete.”

In chapter 3 and verse 3, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” And then this great statement, “When Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

When you ask...what is a Christian? It is one for whom to live is Christ. Christ is our life. We have no other life. We have nothing but Christ and we have everything in Christ.

Apparently the Colossians had been told that there was a lot more needed than just Jesus Christ. Something beyond Christ was necessary. There was some insufficiency in Christ that prompts the Apostle Paul to write these words. The insufficiencies in Christ can be made up by philosophy, human wisdom. The insufficiencies of Christ can be made up by legalism, ceremony, ritual, externalism. Or the insufficiencies in Christ can be made up by mysticism. Or the insufficiencies in Christ can be made up by asceticism, some efforts at self-denial. These, the Colossians were told, will make up what Christ lacks. Christ is not enough.

Though this is a long time ago, nothing has really changed. There are people today who tell us that Christ is not enough, we need more than Christ, more than all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are found in Him. We need Christ plus philosophy, human wisdom.

Let me take you to verse 8. “See to it that no one takes you captive,” chapter 2, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy.” This is human opinion, the mind of man. There are no human solutions to spiritual problems. There are no human insights that take us places the Bible doesn’t, or can’t. That is to say, there is nothing necessary for life and godliness that is not delivered to us by the Word through the Spirit. We don’t need Christ plus insights into human wisdom, spiritual intuition. You can take all the philosophers the world has ever known, in ancient and modern times, all the authors, all the writers, all the playwrights, all the movie producers, all the talk-show hosts, all the psychologists, sociologists, religious leaders and you can take all their endless verbosity about truth and life and morality, and all their solutions to human problems and dilemmas and they add nothing to what is already in Christ.

We don’t even have much classic philosophy anymore. New Age philosophy is not about thinking, it’s about feeling. Philosophy used to be rational exercise, now in a post-modern world it is an irrational exercise. I remember when I was in my university days I decided to take an emphasis in advanced European philosophy. In fact, the class I was in was so advanced, there were only two of us which always means you’ve got to do your daily work because the professor is going to check every day.

I wanted to understand just exactly how philosophers approached truth. In studying the history of western philosophy, I found nothing but an exercise of the degenerate mind of man without God trying to find reason and purpose and reality in the universe in life and inside himself...a hopeless effort. First Corinthians chapter 1, if you’ll notice it for a moment, verse 19,
“It is written,” quoting from Isaiah 29, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever, I will set aside, where is the wise man, where is the scribe?” That’s the legal expert, the scholar. “Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God. God was well pleased with the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believed.” Here is God’s own commentary on the uselessness of human philosophy, the bankruptcy of any effort to discern truth that relates to the soul of man and his eternal life and destiny outside Christ.

I’m pretty sure Colossae had its list of purveyors of human wisdom and since the church at this time was only about six years old and sitting in a sea of corrupt human reasoning, it was easily engulfed like an island surrounded by a turbulent ocean could easily have been a wash in the surging philosophies of the day. And so the Apostle Paul warns them that they must understand that all they need is found in Christ. It is a call to vigilance and a call to affirm the sufficiency of Christ.

Verse 8 actually could be translated, “Be continually being aware.” See to it could be spread out in that way because that’s the Greek verb. Be continually being aware. The truth is never very far away from being attacked and the attacks often call from human efforts to discredit or add to Scripture. You need to be sure of this so that no one takes you captive, sulagogon, sulao, booty, ago, to carry off, so that nobody takes you captive, good translation in the NAS. Nobody kidnaps you. It was

actually referred to kidnapings in Greek usage to plundering a house, seducing a maid, taking war captives. Paul uses it in Galatians 5:1, being led into bondage by human reasoning when Christ is utterly sufficient. Philosophy, it says, through philosophy is just human reason. It has to do with explaining the world, explaining origins, explaining laws, explaining creation, explaining spiritual reality, values, ultimate truth, the meaning of life apart from Christ. This is described here in verse 8 as empty deception. That's philosophy, it is empty deception...an empty lie, a delusion. It is deceitful because it sounds good and because it is purveyed by articulate people but it has no value.

Further, it is according to the tradition of men. It is inadequate human thinking. Further he says, it is according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. And he goes back, that all truth, the riches of knowledge and wisdom reside in Christ, all you need is in Christ. This does not advance you, this regresses you. This takes you back. It is rudimentary.

What does that mean? It is according to the elementary principles of the world, the basic elements of learning. It is not advanced, it is backward. Rudimentary here simply means ABC's, baby talk, principles for children, not adequate for adults. It is an explanation of nothing. It is like when your son comes to you fathers and says, "Daddy, what makes the car go?" And you say, "The engine." That is a very simplistic answer. Or you say, "Gasoline." Or when your little one says, "Where do babies come from, mother?" And you say, "God sends them down." That is anything but a complete answer and pretty soon they figure that out. Why would you go back to such rudimentary solutions when you have the most complex spiritual realities of the universe delineated clearly in Scripture and made clear to us in Christ?

Rather than advancing human wisdom, philosophy regresses it away from mature truth to the infantile musings of children, poverty stricken, puny minds offering their opinions. Galatians 4:3 calls this beggarly elements. Hebrews 5 calls it rudimentary elements.

The truth of the matter is, the philosophers of the world tend to look at Christianity's purveyors, those of us who are believers and proclaim the true gospel, as ignorant, lowlife, simplistic, unsophisticated. The truth is, we possess the mind of Christ because we have Christ. We have all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Him, we have all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Him. We are complete in Him in whom all fullness of deity dwells. Philosophy adds absolutely nothing...absolutely nothing.

It is a myth that somehow the simple gospel is not sufficient. He is all we need. Follow the text. Verse 9, "All the fullness of deity dwells in Him in bodily form, in Him you have been made complete, full." He is the head over all rule and authority. There are no spirits above Him, no angels above Him. He is all we need. He has provided for us, let's look at verse 11, a complete salvation. You were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism in which you were also raised

up with Him through faith and the working of God who raised Him from the dead." That is a magnificent statement about the fact which was demonstrated to you again tonight of our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, as we saw illustrated in baptism again. We have literally died with Him to the old life, the removal of the body of flesh, been buried with Him in His death, raised with Him in His resurrection all through faith, complete salvation, transformation from death into new life.

In verses 13 and 14, not only a complete salvation but a complete forgiveness. "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgression, having canceled out the certificate of death consisting of decrees against us...that's the record of all our sins which was, of course, hostile to us...and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

I want you to notice something. Verse 9, "In Him." Verse 10, "In Him." Verse 11, "In Him." Verse 12, "Buried with Him. Raised with Him." Verse 13, "He made you together alive with Him." It is about being in Him, in Him, with Him, with Him. And because we have Christ, we have complete salvation and complete forgiveness...so complete that He has literally blotted out our transgressions, canceled out, erased, wiped off our sins.

In verse 15, "On our behalf He disarmed the rulers and authorities, the host of hell, the demons, Satan." He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them. Again, through Him. When He disarmed the rulers and authorities, we triumphed over them through Him. Because we have Christ, we have complete salvation. Because we have Christ, we have complete forgiveness. Because we have Christ, we have complete victory over all the hosts of hell. Philosophy adds nothing whatsoever to that. What we offer in offering the gospel is what this text presents. We are offering a transformation through faith in Jesus Christ from death to life. We are offering the forgiveness of all our sins for Jesus paid in full the penalty for those sins, the list of our sins literally was nailed to His cross. We are offering in the gospel true, total, complete, triumph over Satan and demons. Philosophy can do nothing to embellish that.

But another attack comes on the sufficiency of Christ. It comes not from philosophy or rationalism, but from legalism.

Legalism...verse 16, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

In the first point about rationalism or philosophy, we saw that we don't need philosophy or human wisdom, we have everything we need in Him. In Him we have the fullness of deity. In Him we have been made complete. In Him we have been cleansed, saved, had the flesh, as it were, removed,

died to the old and risen to the new. In Him we have the total forgiveness of all our sins and through Him complete victory over Satan and all his hosts, all in Him.

Here in verses 16 and 17, the substance, again at the end of verse 17, belongs to Christ. All external things are only a shadow of that substance.

Now what are we seeing? Well we're looking at something very familiar to the Apostle Paul because he was a legalist. He was a faithful Jew, loyal to the law, a Pharisee, circumcised, zealous, he was a Pharisee in the extreme sense. Read Philippians 3:4 through 6 where he describes the fastidious extreme nature of his externalism. But his heart was wretched until he found in Christ a righteousness that was not his own, a righteousness of God given to Him by faith in Christ. Prior to that he was trying to achieve a righteousness on his own which he could not do.

And so Paul says in verses 16 and 17, "Don't let anybody act as your judge. Render a spiritual verdict on your life by some external measure, such as food, or drink, or a festival, or a new moon, or a Sabbath day." Don't let anybody judge you based on those kinds of things. If you will remember Romans chapter 10, you will remember Paul's clear assessment of the problem with the Jews. He says in verse 1 of Romans 10, "My heart's desire, my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." But here's the problem. "They have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge. They don't know about God's righteousness and they seek to establish their own righteousness and therefore do not subject themselves to the righteousness of God for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Here are the Jews and they're trying to achieve righteousness, they're trying to earn heaven. They're trying to gain righteousness by what they do morally, religiously, ceremonially. And this is a misunderstanding of God's righteousness. They don't know that God is as righteous as He is, He's way too righteous for them to achieve a righteousness that satisfies Him. They work so hard to achieve their own righteousness which falls way short and they don't realize that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Christ when you believe in Him ends the tyranny of the law. Christ becomes our law-keeper in our place and becomes the object of God's punishment for our sins. So, righteousness is gained only through the work of Christ and given only to those who depend solely on that work. Don't let anybody think they can render a verdict on your spiritual life by what you eat, what you drink, what religious festivals or events you go to and whether you observe new moon, Sabbath day laws. Those were merely shadows...just shadows. It's not about sacraments and ceremonies, and rituals, and fasting. It's not even about baptism, that can be just an external superficial act. Legalism is the attitude that says true spirituality is based on external behaviors.

This was big with the Jews, even among the Jews who gave some recognition to Christ. They said Christ is not enough. They can believe in Christ but they must be circumcised, they can believe in Christ but they must observe the Sabbath day. They can believe in Christ but they must observe the law of Moses or they will be rejected by God.

That is not to diminish the moral law of God, for when you come to Christ, you have a capability to obey that law by the work of transformation and the work of the Holy Spirit. There are so many who would like to come to us and say, "Yes, you may say you have Christ but if you're a real Christian, here's the kind of behavior that you need to do ceremonially to validate that, or to please God." Those things, and it's so important to understand that are merely shadows, the substance is Christ. If you have Christ, you have everything. Will you love t he Lord's day? Yes. Will you love the Lord? Yes. Will you desire to honor and worship Him? Yes. Will you desire to come to His table? Yes. Will you desire to be baptized? Yes, from the heart you will do that as the fruit of transformation, not as the means.

And much could be said about that. It's an ever-present issue. But for time's sake, the third possibility that had pressed itself against the Colossians was that Christ was not enough, there needed to be something more. Let's call this mysticism...mysticism. I've had to deal with this through my life. I have preached on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, what the Bible teaches about spiritual life, what the Bible teaches about the dynamics of spiritual life. And I have been accused by many people of being void of the Holy Spirit because I've never spoken in tongues, being void of the Holy Spirit because I do not recognize that some are saying the Holy Spirit is doing a miracle ministry in this age and if I don't acknowledge that then I am quenching the Spirit of God, that I am somehow the enemy of the Spirit of God and therefore void of His influence and His power in my life, that I need to be open to deeper experiences, that I need to be open to higher experiences, that I need to be open to more intuitive spiritual realities. I've had strange conversations with people who tell me that Jesus talks to them and they talk to Jesus and ask me if I've ever had those personal conversations. And they shake their heads at the poor deprived guy that I am because I've never had these kinds of experiences.

There are people who talk about conversations they have with angels and conversations they have with the Lord and things the Lord says to them. And when I'm asked if I've ever had any of those conversations, my answer is...No, but God speaks to me constantly, God speaks to me every single day. In fact, He speaks to me every single time I open the Bible and read one word. And He speaks crystal clear and I know exactly what He is saying. And He speaks to me every time I recite a verse in my mind, or out loud. He speaks to me every time I think a biblical thought and a biblical truth. But somehow I'm being cheated and something profound is missing because I haven't had a mystical experience.

Look at verses 18 and 19, this is where Paul deals with that. “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize.” That’s the idea that reminds us again that this was an attack coming on these Colossians, that Christ was not enough, they needed philosophy. Christ was not enough, they needed legalism. There would be Jews pressing the second one, there would be Gentiles, no doubt, pressing the first one. Then the mystics show up. “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize.” People telling you that somehow you’re cheated, somehow you’re forfeiting your reward, somehow you’re missing the mark, you’re falling short of all the spiritual events, realities, that are available to you by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.

Wow, that’s a pretty strong assessment. Don’t let anyone deny you your prize by saying you really are unworthy of the best that God has to give. Someone who comes along apparently humble, delighting in self-abasement. Now when you’re happy about your humility, you haven’t got it. When you’re overjoyed to tell folks how humble you are, you just missed it. This is a person who is proud to be humble. This was a kind of reverse pride in which people were saying I know I am nothing, I am the lowliest of the low and it’s so remarkable how the angels come to me and God speaks to me because I’m really nothing and I have these astonishing visions and I’m so lowly. This is a smarmy kind of hypocrisy. There are those people who say they have encounters with angels, who have visions, secret revelations...the Lord told me this, the Lord told me that. And they become puffed up in their fleshly mind and they are the opposite of the self-abasing people they want you to think they are.

Their problem? “They do not...verse 19...hold fast to the head.” Who’s the head? Christ. I have Christ, I need nothing more. I’m not looking for conversations with angels. I’m not looking for voices from heaven. I only had one vision in my life and I married her. I have had no more. I want no more. I want no more, I seek no more, I have Christ...I need nothing more. If I need a vision of Christ, if I want to gaze in His glory and be transfixed, I open the pages of Scripture where His glory explodes on my mind. That’s all I need. And it is not a distant glory that I see, it is that very glory that shines in my heart by the work of God for Christ is mine and I am His, and I’m actually not even sure where I end and He begins. “For to me to live is Christ. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me.” I don’t know where He ends and I begin or I end and He begins. All the good is Him, all the bad is me. I seek nothing else. I want to hold fast to the head from whom the entire body being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments grows with the growth which is from God. That goes not just for me but, friends, that goes for all of you, the whole body of Christ is held together by its connection to the head. All we need is the head, all we need is Christ, the Christ revealed in Scripture.

There were another group coming along and making suggestions about the insufficiency of Christ, not only those who were the rationalists saying you need Christ plus human wisdom. Paul disdained that. That’s why he said, “I’m determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him

crucified, and I do not come to you with human wisdom," 1 Corinthians 2. There were those who said you need Christ plus legalism, they were the Judaizers, the ones holding on to their Judaism who wanted to impose all that external stuff on Christians which was but a shadow and not the substance. There were always those mystics, they're still around, who come along and tell you somehow you're falling short of the best that God can give you, you're getting cheated out of your ultimate prize because you're not living on the higher mystical intuitive spiritual plain. You need Christ plus so much more.

And then there are those, fourthly, who come with the offering of asceticism...asceticism...rationalism, legalism, mysticism and asceticism. What is asceticism? It's a word that means self-denial. In its extreme form it is self-injury, inflicting wounds on yourself.

Notice in verse 20, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, which would include all of these things that are supposedly additions to Christ, they are regressions, in fact, but if you have died with Christ, you now live with Christ. If you are dead to the elementary principles of the world, why as if you were living in the world do you submit yourself to decrees such as do not handle, do not taste, do not touch?" These are those who we could call the monastics, if you will. Those people who think Christ is not enough, you've got to go further in the realm of self-denial and self-inflicted pain. This again is another form of the religion of human achievement that looks not so much at ceremony, not so much at moral behavior and ritual, but it looks at ways in which somehow you can achieve a higher plain of spirituality by self-denial. You become a monk and you eat rice and drink water for the rest of your life and wear the same clothes and live in a tiny little cell. And you have no marriage, and no social life, and no family and no hope and no future. And if you're really serious, you become a monk who decides it's a sin to bathe because if you bathed, you would see yourself naked. And so, you acquire vermin which you then designate as holy vermin because they are the evidence of your holiness. Or you become a flagellante and you get a whip and you beat your body raw. Or you wear a belt. I've met people who have them on. The inside of which has nails that rip and tear your flesh as you move about your day, endeavoring by what is called here some kind of self-flagellation, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, some kind of self-denial. Or crawling on your knees until they bleed.

This is useless, verse 22. All these things are destined to perish with the using. All of this stuff dies. It is just in accordance with the commandments and teaching of men. Monks waste their lives. Nuns, priests, in their foolish attempt to add something to Christ in their forms of self-denial, all of that is destined to perish. It is all human.

Verse 23 says, "These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom, of a kind of spiritual wisdom." We say, "Oh, so-and-so is so sacrificial, so self-denying, a vow of poverty, a vow of abstinence, a vow of isolation, even a vow of emasculation in the case of many in the past history. Vows of self-inflicted pain." There are many people even today who their whole lives fill their shoes

with bits of glass and metal to wound their feet as they walk. This to be sure has the appearance of some kind of spiritual transcendent wisdom. But it is self-made religion, self-abasement. And this severe treatment of the body that has, please notice, no value against fleshly indulgence.

You say, “Oh they must be holy.” Guess again. That does nothing. Witness the scandal of the priesthood. In fact, that’s like pouring gasoline on a fire, it’s a show of self-imposed fleshly religion that means nothing.

One writer said, “Any asceticism is to a great deal more to men’s tastes than truly abandoning self.” Wow. In fact, it was Alexander McClaren who said, “They would rather stick hooks in their backs and do the swinging pujah(??) than give up their sins.” It just indulges the flesh in a different way and deceives the mind about the true condition. And they can’t repress the flesh with any of that. And so they live in a kind of self-imposed repression that makes them moral time bombs that are going to explode somewhere.

Now, “No,” people will say, “it’s Jesus Christ plus human wisdom, it’s Jesus Christ plus external rules, it’s Jesus Christ plus visions and experiences, Jesus Christ plus self-denial, self-abasement, severe treatment of the body,” and the Holy Spirit says, “It’s Jesus Christ plus nothing.” So the next time somebody says to you, “What does the gospel offer me? What does the Bible offer?”, you say this, “Jesus Christ.” That’s the person that Christianity offers and in Him complete salvation and in Him complete forgiveness, and in Him complete victory, and in Him complete sufficiency. To have Him is to have everything. Not to have Him is to have nothing. John 1:16, “Of His fullness have all we received.” Is that not a great statement? All that He is becomes ours. Ephesians 3:8 puts it this way, “In Him we have unsearchable riches.” First Corinthians 3, “All things belong to you, whether the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all things belong to you because you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.” Pursue Him and Him alone.

It was Jeremiah Burrows, the powerful Puritan, who wrote in 1656, “God the Father is infinitely satisfied in Christ. He is all in all to God. Surely if Christ is an object sufficient for the satisfaction of the Father, much more than is He an object sufficient for the satisfaction of every soul.” God can find His satisfaction in Christ. Surely you can find yours there, as well.

All that is in Christ in abundance then is ours. I’m going to close with the story...when I wrote the book Our Sufficiency in Christ, I think it’s in that book, in one of the chapters I told this really odd story because it was true. Homer and Langley Collier were sons of a respected New York doctor. Both had earned college degrees. Homer had studied at Columbia University to be an attorney. When old Dr. Collier died in the early part of the century, his two sons inherited the family mansion and estate in New York. The two were both bachelors and financially secure because the father had made a lot of money. They chose a strange life style, not consistent with the material status their inheritance gave them. They received a fortune. They lived in seclusion, boarded up the widows and padlocked

the doors of the great house. All the utilities, including the water, were shut off. No one was seen coming and going from the house, it appeared empty.

On March 21, 1947, police received anonymous telephone tip that a man had died inside the boarded-up house. It had been boarded up for many years. Unable to force their way into the front door, the authorities entered through a second-story window. Inside they found Homer's corpse on a bed. He had died clutching the February 22, 1920 issue of the Jewish Morning Journal though he had been totally blind for years. This macabre scene was set up against an equally grotesque backdrop. The brothers for decades had been collecting junk. The house was crammed full of broken machinery, auto parts, boxes, appliances, folding chairs, musical instruments, rags, assorted odds and ends and bundles of old newspapers, all of it was completely worthless. They were what we now call obsessive hoarders. An enormous mountain of debris blocked the front door. Investigators were forced to continue to use the upstair's windows for weeks while excavators worked to clear a path to the door.

Nearly three weeks later, as workman were still hauling heaps of refuse away, someone made a grizzly discovery. Langley's body was found, buried beneath a pile of rubbish six feet away from where Homer died. Langley had been crushed to death in a crude booby trap he had built to protect his junk from thieves. Eventually the authorities in New York took out 140 tons of garbage.

When I read that, I thought, Homer and Langley make a sad but fitting parable of the way many Christian people live. They have an inheritance in Jesus Christ that is sufficient for all their needs and they live in unnecessary self-imposed deprivation piling up junk and neglecting the abundant resources that are rightfully theirs to enjoy in Christ. Homer and Langley turned their home into a squalid dump. Spurning their father's great legacy they lived with trash.

Christ is all we need. He is more than enough. The Bible calls Him life, food, root, clothing, head, hope, righteousness, refuge, light, life, peace, Passover, portion, substitute, freedom, fountain, wisdom, standard, way, example, door, dew, sun, shield, reward, strength, song, sanctification, supplier, resurrection, redemption, teacher, ladder, shepherd, friend, truth, treasure, temple, ark, altar and more. And so we go back to where we started, it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form and we are by faith in Him. He is enough. Learn Christ and you have all you will ever need.

Father, thank You for our time tonight. There could be no greater subject than this and we have offered a meager attempt to grasp the wonder of what it means to have Christ. May we define our lives this way, we love Christ, we know Christ, we serve Christ, we worship Christ. We desire Christ in all His glory to be displayed through us. May it be that for us to live is Christ and when we are called Christians, may it be true that we are, as it were, little Christs. May we in gazing into His glory

be transformed into His image. We ask nothing more than Christ. Christ is all and in all. Amen.

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