

“Let the Witnesses Take the Stand”

I. This is the Witness of the Heavens—Christ is All

a) *The Witness of the Father*

Each of the few times we hear God the Father speak audibly in the gospels He speaks to point us to Christ—to God the Son—to Jesus, with whom He is well pleased. “Whenever God the Father speaks, He speaks of His Son, for Christ is foremost on His heart” (*Jesus Manifesto* 3).

b) *The Witness of the Holy Spirit*

“How does the Spirit convict the world? He does it by showing Christ to the world. The Holy Spirit has come to reveal, to glorify, to magnify, to unveil, to *exalt* the Lord Jesus Christ. He takes what is true of Christ and makes it real and alive in the lives of human beings. That’s the occupation and preoccupation of the Spirit. It’s what He does for a living” (4).

c) *The Witness of the angels*

The angelic hosts exist to worship / serve the Christ.

Hebrews 1:6 NKJV

When [God] again brings the firstborn [that’s Jesus] into the world, He says: “Let all the angels of God worship Him.”

The Father points to Christ. The Spirit points to Christ. The angels point to Christ.

Here is the testimony: the entire heavenly realm is occupied by Christ and preoccupied with Christ; Christ is the center, Christ is the circumference, and Christ is everything in between; Christ is all.

II. This is the Witness of Creation—Christ is All

The entire multiverse—all that exists—all of it—was created by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ.

Colossians 1:16-17 NKJV

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Christ holds all things together. Creation falls apart without Christ.

Ephesians 1:10 CEB

This is what God planned for the climax of all times: to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth.

Everything will be brought to Christ, and Christ will heal creation.

A complete biblical view of salvation is not some human beings will get to go up there to a location called Heaven when they die, but that Heaven is where God's rule is full and uncontested. The Fall brought separation and sin, violence and villainy, darkness and disease, the powers and the patriarchy, and Heaven (God's full reign) and Earth (the place we are) divorced, humans were alienated from God, their true selves, one another, and Creation.

But God would not stand for the status quo and set about the reconciliation of all things. God in Christ came to bring Heaven here, dealing the deathblow to all the forces of evil in the cross and the resurrection, establishing a beachhead from which God the Spirit could continue to expand the Kingdom of God, unstoppable new life continuously replicating to cover this spiritually dead planet. And so everything will eventually be brought to Christ and God will heal Creation.

Christ is stamped on creation, and the entire creation bears witness to Him.

Compare the creation accounts of Genesis with what we know of Christ from the New Testament:

Day 1 – God creates light

Christ is light (John 8:12)

Day 2 – God creates water

Christ is water (John 4:10; 7:38).

Day 3 – God creates plant life

Christ is the life that emerged on the third day after the waters below the firmament were separated from the water above (Genesis 1:9-13; 1 Corinthians 15:4).

Christ is the True Vine (John 15:1; 6:57).

Christ is the wheat and the bread of life (John 12:24; 6:35).

Day 4 – God creates the sun, the moon, and the stars

Christ is the sun (Malachi 4:2).

Christ is the moon (Colossians 2:16-17).

Christ is the morning star (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16).

Day 5-6 – God creates animal life

Christ is the true Lamb (John 1:29; Revelation 5).

Day 6 – God creates human beings

Christ is the model human (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:47).

Day 7 – God creates Sabbath

Christ is the real Sabbath (Colossians 2:16-17).

Here is the testimony: Creation is occupied by Christ and preoccupied with Christ; Christ is the center, Christ is the circumference, and Christ is everything in between; Christ is all.

III. This is the Witness of the Old Testament—Christ is All

All of the stories and lessons of God’s people in history point to Christ.

Consider Jonah: a prophet given a word from God for “outsiders”, sent to them, one come up out of the watery grave so that he might present good news to these outsiders, so that they might know God.

All of the Old Testament points to Christ. The festivals—Christ. The prophecies—Christ. The covenants—Christ. The Law—Christ. All the language of shepherds and lambs—Christ. The repeated number of 12—Christ. The repeated number of 40—Christ. The ark that saved life—Christ. The Temple—Christ. The prophets, priest, and kings—Christ.

Christ is the Second Adam, the Second Noah, the Second Abraham, the Second Moses, the Second David... Jesus is the new Israel.

Over and over—Christ. We could go on and on. It all points to Christ. Christ is all through the Old Testament. And friends we need both testaments—without the first testament we’d miss the background, we’d miss the context, we’d miss the fullness of His reasons for coming—without the second testament we’d miss out on Christ. And Christ is all.

Jesus occupies the heart of salvation history and preoccupied the minds of God’s faithful children, even when they didn’t know for whom they were waiting; to truly understand the Old Testament, Christ must be placed at the center, Christ must be considered around the circumference, and Christ must be read into everything in between; Christ is all.

IV. This is the Witness of the New Testament—Christ is All

a) The Witness of the Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they exist to point us to Christ. That is their purpose. We don't worship the gospels. We don't exploit the gospels for our own agendas. The gospels exist to serve Christ and bring us to Christ that we too might serve Him. Christ is all.

This is the testimony of the gospels: Jesus—the Word—occupies the words and preoccupies the images and the imaginations of the readers and hearers; Christ is the gospels' center, Christ is the gospels' circumference, and Christ is everything in between; Christ is all.

b) The Witness of the Twelve

What Jesus began, His disciples continue. He ascended. He's ruling from on high. He gathered His Church. He sent the Holy Spirit. He continues His work of occupying and preoccupying all things through that holy symbiotic work of His Spirit with His Body.

The first twelve disciples of Jesus were so occupied with Christ and preoccupied with Christ that they made Him the center of their life and the circumference of their life together and everything in between. They filled their hearts and their minds and their souls and their homes and their days and their calendars with Him.

He became the center of their preaching, and the circumference of their teaching, and everything in between, for when their mouths were open a powerful witness to Christ poured forth.

Christ is all, and Christ became their all.

Peter – his first sermon in Acts, guess what he talked about... Christ. Oh, and his letters, guess what he wrote about... Christ.

Philip

Acts 8:5

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

This was their focus, their priority, their life, their love; this was their occupation and their preoccupation; this was what centered them and surrounded them and what they even squeeze into the cracks: Christ.

Acts 5:42 CEB

Every day they continued to teach and proclaim the good news that Jesus is the Christ, both in the temple and in the houses.

Jesus was the heart of their preaching.

1 John 1:1-3 NASB

[The Apostle John writes] What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Let me read it to you again...

What was from the beginning [Christ], what we have heard [Christ], what we have seen with our eyes [Christ], what we have looked at and touched with our hands [Christ], concerning the Word of Life [that is our Christ]—and the life was manifested [Christ], and we have seen [Christ] and testify [Christ] and proclaim to you [Christ] the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us [Christ]—what we have seen [Christ] and heard [Christ] we proclaim to you also [Christ], so that you too may have fellowship with us [through Christ]; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This is the testimony of the Twelve: Jesus occupies their hearts and preoccupies their minds; Christ is their center, Christ is their circumference, and Christ is their everything in between; for Peter and Philip and John and the all the first generation of disciples, Christ is all.

c) The Witness of Paul

Paul has an encounter with the living Word of God, with Jesus, the Christ, and immediately responds. Heart re-orientation. Life re-orientation. For that is worship, to have an encounter with the Word of God—that is Jesus Christ—and respond with life-altering devotion.

Acts 9:20

Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

That was Paul's immediate response, and he never wavered later, he continued in ministry, taking others along and training them.

Acts 17:3

[He preached again and again] ...explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

Paul wrote to the Colossians to tell them about a Jesus they never knew. He preached Christ to them—the supremacy, the sufficiency, the sovereignty, the fullness.

See how many times Paul referred to Christ in the opening of his letters:

Colossians ch.1 (29 total verses): 30 references to Christ

Ephesians ch.1 (23 total verses): 26 references to Christ

Philippians ch.1 (30 total verses): 20 references to Christ

Romans 1:1-9 (9 verses): 11 references to Christ

1 Corinthians 1:1-10 (10 verses): 13 references to Christ

2 Corinthians 1:1-5 (5 verses): 5 references to Christ

Galatians 1:1-4 (4 verses): 4 references to Christ

This is Paul’s testimony: Jesus occupies his heart and preoccupies his mind; Christ is his center, Christ is his circumference, and Christ is everything in between; for Paul, Christ is all.

V. This is the Witness of the Church—Christ is All

a) The Witness of the Early Church

The New Testament ministry is the ministry of telling others—telling everyone—about Christ and bringing men and women and children into holy relationship with God through Christ.

Ephesians 3:8 NKJV

...this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...

Colossians 1:28 NASB

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man [and woman] and teaching every man [and woman] with all wisdom, so that we may present every man [and woman] complete in Christ.

Galatians 1:16 NKJV

...that I might preach [Christ] among the Gentiles...

2 Corinthians 4:5 NKJV

For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord...

This is the witness of the early Church; this is the witness of the faithful church around the globe and throughout time: Jesus must be the occupation and the preoccupation; Christ must be the center, Christ must be the circumference, and Christ must be everything in between; Christ must be all.

For generations upon generations, this is the legacy, this is the faith which must be passed on: Christ is all.

Listen:

“The Father, the Holy Spirit, the angels, all of creation, the Scriptures, and the early apostles’ ministries all point their fingers to Jesus. The spotlight of heaven and earth never leaves Christ. He is the melody, the harmony, the rhythm, the tempo, and the music behind all things. The heavens and the earth sing His song and play His tune” (16).

b) The Witness of Today’s Church

Christ is all.

J.C. Ryle, an Anglican bishop put it this way, “Christ is all (Colossians 3:11). These three words are the essence and the substance of Christianity. If our hearts can really go along with them, it is well with our souls; if not, we may be sure we have yet much to learn” (J.C. Ryle, Holiness, 196).

Everything in space and time points to Christ. What about today’s church?

I look and listen to what is being preached in churches today. Today’s American preachers will speak to you about:

- Leadership principles
- Church multiplication strategies
- How to build a movement
- How to move a building
- How to raise funds for a building renovation project—probably using Nehemiah
- How to live a good, moral life
- How to live by blind faith
- How to be a good American citizen
- How you should’ve voted in the last presidential election
- How you should vote in the next presidential election
- The newest social justice cause you must care about #savethekangaroos

- How to save the lost—in three easy steps, or with a five-sentence prayer, maybe even all in your power without any help from Jesus
- Health and wealth
- The believer’s right to “name it and claim it”
- Spiritual warfare
- Divine healing
- Signs, wonders, miracles
- Visions and dreams, usually using Daniel and Ezekiel
- End-times bologna usually using an “interpretation” of Revelation from someone who isn’t qualified to know what it means
- How to memorize Bible verses for when you feel blue
- How to follow the 613 Old Testament laws without ever slipping up
- Comparative religions—how religions agree and differ—sometimes preaching tolerance and acceptance and universalism, sometimes preaching fear and hatred and crusade-like annihilation
- Creation versus evolution
- Human sexuality concerns
- Family relationships, roles, and responsibilities
- Why you should feel guilty (spoiler alert: you aren’t charitable enough)
- Why you should feel ashamed (spoiler alert: you aren’t prim and proper and prudish and Puritanical enough)
- How to get inner peace, which often sounds more new agey than Christian

I look and I listen and I wonder: where is Christ?!

Ok, a few things on that list belong if—*if*—Christ is first and foremost in the preaching and teaching of the church, *and* Christ is woven through every topic. And some of those don’t belong at all. All real examples though. We could do a preacher scavenger hunt on the internet.

Where is Christ?

Now I confess to you now, at times I have failed to preach Christ. I have failed to give you Christ before all else.

But I am convicted. Christ is all. If you’ve heard anything else from me, forget about it! Christ is all.

We must teach Jesus before anything else. Perhaps, we must teach Jesus to the exclusion of everything else.

Christianity is Christ.

It's not... community for community's sake... or America's national myth... or a get-out-of-hell-free card... or how to learn to be nice, kind, and fair... or even the Bible.

Christianity is Christ. Nothing more. Nothing less.

If you are here to receive anything other than Christ... well there's nothing for you here!

Christianity is Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ. It's all Christ. Christ is all.

The Church is the Body of Christ. Whenever a "church" departs from Christ, they are no longer a church! If a group of people are gathering and Jesus is not the center of what they are thinking and doing, they are something other than a church. I don't know what they are, but they're not a church.

For a group of gathered people to be church, Jesus must occupy their hearts and preoccupy their minds; Christ must be their center, and Christ must be their circumference, and Christ must be their everything in between; Christ must be their all.

What about Trinity church? Is that true of us? Is Christ the very center of this group of people, the axis around which we rotate, the center of our life together and our work together? At the center, at the core, do we find Jesus, and nothing else? What about the circumference? Is Christ around the edges? Does Christ surround us? And what about everything in-between? Is it all Christ? Or are there things that need to go?... attitudes, mindsets, worldviews, beliefs, behaviors, actions, speech, choices, relationships... that need to be surrendered, released, or taken captive for Christ?

Christianity is Christ. People being reconciled to God through Christ by receiving His free grace and responding with love and obedience. It's a relationship which brings transformation which leaves evidence. Relationship > Transformation > Evidence. With Christ. From Christ. Through Christ. To Christ. For Christ and the world.

Christ must be all for Trinity. This is my conviction and my prayer.

VI. Christ Is All—Is this *Your* Witness?

We're waiting for the last witness to take the stand.

Christ is in everything. Christ must be in your everything. Christ must be your everything.

Do you know Christ? Not, know *about* Christ... exposure, familiarity, knowledge, wisdom.

Do you know Christ? Not, I know someone who knows Christ... six degrees of separation, encounter, acquaintance, follower, friend.

Do you know Christ? Is Christ your all? Perhaps, this is the same question.

Will Jesus occupy your heart and preoccupy your mind? Will Christ be the center of your life? Will Christ be the circumference of your life? Will Christ be everything in between? Will Christ be your all?

What will you say when it's your turn to take the stand?

In the name of Jesus our Christ. Amen.

[Pray]