

More Than a Creed
From What I Believe to How I Think
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It is unfortunate that at the heart of the Christian message, there is an English word that has such a diverse and varied set of English definitions. The word I'm thinking of is the word believe. We all have a set of beliefs. I assume you believe that the world is round. Nod at me if you're on track with that one. You probably believe that Shaquille O'Neal is paid too much, right? Most of you believe that Pepsi is better than Coke. All right, just the enlightened half of you think that, I guess. Sorry. You believe, I assume from hearing a few of my sermons, that my boys, they like baseball. You believe that. Maybe no first-hand experience, but you believe it. You believe that the light bulb was a good invention. I mean, you know, those are all, we would use the word believe. We believe those things.

But most of the beliefs that we have, that we say we believe, are just benign facts that we affirm, and they're filed away somewhere neatly in the corners of our minds. And if ever someone were to bring the sheet of paper out and say, do you believe this, you would nod and you would say, yes, I believe that. But they just most of the time sit there, and until they're called for, they don't cause much of a problem. They don't cause much of an effect at all on your life.

It's unfortunate that a lot of people bring that concept and that definition of belief into their understanding of Christianity. And when we talk about belief in the realm of theology and doctrine and Christianity, people tend to carry that meaning right on over into that. A lot of people think that they believe a certain set of things and that one day maybe they think there's going to be a little entrance exam there at the gates of heaven or the New Jerusalem. Maybe they buy into the old Peter thing. There he is, got a few angels standing around, and he's going to ask you some questions like, do you believe in God? And you're going to have a chance to affirm that. Or maybe you say, no, I know it's more specific than that. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? And so you'll have a chance to affirm that or not affirm that. Or maybe that Evangelism Explosion thing was right, and they're going to ask you, do you believe that Jesus is your only hope? You know, and then you say, yes, I affirm that. Or maybe, you know, there's real hardcore preachers. Maybe they're right. So maybe they're going to ask the question, do you believe that Jesus is Lord? And then if you get that right, then you get to get in.

And I just sense that probably 95% of the people in the world, when they think about the concept of belief in Christianity, tie some kind of simplistic meaning to it as that illustration describes. And yet nothing could be further from the truth. Belief in the pages of the New Testament is nothing like that at all. It's something that we don't hold. It's something really that you could say, it holds us. It changes us. It does something to us because we are placing our trust in something else. It has a transforming effect on our lives.

You could jot down a passage like James 2:19 to recognize the Bible takes the idea of affirming a fact, as it relates to the central core of Christianity, and slides it right off the table into the trash bucket when it says even the demons believe. Remember that text? And they shudder. But that doesn't mean anything as it relates to their redemption or their Christianity. Of course, they're not saved, but they're going to vote true on the question, is Jesus Lord? They're going to nod because they know it's true.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that the truths about Jesus are not something that you just file away in your minds. You nod or affirm. They're not passive or inactive facts. They're controlling facts. As Jesus put it, when you want to know in a sentence what it means to be a follower of Christ, you've got to be committed to loving God. And one of the things he says is with all of your mind. And that's a little different than the concept of affirming a fact or two about the deity of Christ or the supremacy of Christ.

We've been studying in the first two chapters of Hebrews, and if you haven't turned there already, please do, and review as you skim by the first two chapters the ideas that we've already established clearly, that Jesus is supreme. The biblical word for it is he's Lord. He's better than angels. He's better than anything. He's the exact representation of the nature of God. And then in chapter 2, he says, you better listen to him. You better respond to the message that he brings. And all of that's well and good, and we understand why he came, and the incarnation was important, and he did a lot of work for us, and all of that's fantastic. But it's a response in chapter 3 that the writer of Hebrews says it's going to do something to your mind. And he guides the listener, the reader, to the place of saying, listen, you've got to know this is going to transform your thinking. This is not a belief that you hold. It's a belief that holds you. It changes your thinking.

Now, all of us know what it's like to love something or someone with all of our mind. We get introduced to the concept around junior high or high school, right? I remember when I had reached the conclusion that this little brunette there that I sat with in second-period English class, her name was Carlin, and I had just become convinced and believed with all of my mind that she was the greatest. Carlin was the greatest. And that wasn't a passive concept, by the way. In my mind, it became a controlling concept for me. As a matter of fact, a very costly concept for me in many ways, because I was busy dating this redhead named Vicky, and so I had work to do to bring this realization that Carlin is the greatest into reality for me. And to love her with all my mind was not just that I would ponder her or think of her; it was that it was a controlling fact. That fact would change everything about my life. And it took a grip on my heart.

In chapter 2, the Bible says, listen, that's what it's going to come down to on a daily basis for you. Christianity is not a creed. It's not a set of beliefs. It's something that controls your very thinking. Look at it as he gives some very pointed labels for the Christian here in chapter 2. He's about to start a whole other comparison. If you know the book or you read the title there above verse 1, a comparison that Christ is greater than Moses. But we're not even going to have time to get to that today. All we want to look at is the fact that this concept, as he turns from first-person plural pronouns to second-person pronouns, he says, "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." Those two words sum up everything that we've already studied in the first two chapters. And he says, listen, your mind just needs to settle in on this. Fix your thoughts there, guys. I mean, he's been very embracing and being a part of the group as he says, we and us, and now he says, you guys just make sure that your minds are fixed on Christ.

He begins with some thoughts here about the Christians, those that he's writing to. And he calls them some names, unique names in the New Testament. You'll never see this combination of words anywhere else in the New Testament. Here's what he says in verse number 1. He says, I want to call you guys holy brothers. It's an interesting description of these people. If we are to have a Christianity, a belief, a concept about Jesus being the greatest that controls everything about our lives, starting with our minds, we need to realize that one of the things that that does is it changes everything about who we are.

As a matter of fact, when I came to the place of recognizing Carlin is the greatest, I now then, after exchanging a little necklace on my front porch one late night, it changed everything about my status. Now all of a sudden she starts talking to me about your mind. See, we have this relationship now which redefines who I am. If Christ is the greatest for you, you've got to get to the place where you recognize that changes, or ought to change, in every way you think about yourself. It ought to change the way you think about yourself.

And in this text I prefaced it on your worksheet this way. You ought to ditch all other thoughts of yourself and get down to this basic understanding of you. And take a look at the first word. He says, "Therefore, holy brothers." What's the word holy mean? Set apart, right? We've been around the block, learned that word many times. It means to be set apart. You are now exclusively mine.

1. Think of Yourself as God's

Number one on your outline, let's just start with that word, and we'll see that every other description from here on in about us, it all relates to this one concept. Number one on your outline, jot it down. Ditch all other thoughts of yourself and think of yourself as God's. All of a sudden now, if Christ is the greatest for you, if Jesus is really Lord to you, it changes everything about how you ought to view yourself. Because then you are, in God's mind, set apart for him. If you're really going to claim me as the greatest, Jesus says, you're mine.

It's interesting how as he sends the call out to the disciples early on in the Gospels, he immediately starts calling them his. Now you're my disciples. Now you're my followers. Now you're my people. Now you're my group. You're my band. You're mine. And he tries to get these disciples, and here the writer of Hebrews is trying to get us to recognize, you ought to take every other thought about yourself and make it subordinate to this, that if you are one who affirms that Jesus is Lord, you're now saying to yourself, that means that really I'm set apart for him. I'm exclusively his. That's what it means to be holy. When something is holy, it means set apart.

Turn your Bibles, if you would, to Ephesians chapter 1, and I want to show you that this little silly high school analogy about me and my later-to-be wife, Carlin, is really not just a silly, sappy, romantic analogy that's inferior to the concepts of the New Testament as it relates to me and God. As a matter of fact, the concept of romance, the concept of engagement, is exactly where God wants us to be as we think about the idea of how God views us and how we ought to view ourselves. Take a look at this text. It's powerful. As a matter of fact, it's placed in the concepts and the culture of engagement and romance. Not right there on the surface, but you'll see it.

Look at verse number 13. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 13 says, "And you also," Ephesians 1:13, "were included in Christ." There's the embrace. There's the acceptance. "When you heard the word of truth, the good news, the gospel of your salvation," everything we've covered in chapter 2, "having believed," there's our word, you've trusted, you've put your confidence in him that Jesus is who he says he is, he's done what he says he's done, "you were," now notice this, "marked in him with a seal." What is that? That's ownership. Now you're his. And here's the mark. Here's the pledge. "The promised Holy Spirit."

I know it's tucked away underneath the English grammar here, but the concept is it's like an engagement ring. It's like the promise ring. Here comes the Holy Spirit, and he is given to you as a promise, "who is," verse 14, "a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those

who are God's possession to the praise of his glory." That's so huge. I mean, that's so amazing, that the concept of me coming one day to the place of saying, listen, I'm going to be a Christian. I'm going to follow Christ. Jesus is going to be my Lord. All of a sudden now it's all about ownership. It's all about being set apart for him. It's all about now you need to view yourself as mine.

And that changes everything, because I know how you view yourself. Maybe yourself as somebody's mom or someone's husband or a person in this business or the owner of this company or whatever. All of that's so secondary. The concept is that we need to rethink and retool our minds, so when it comes down to thinking about ourselves and pondering who we are, the concept is, man, I'm not owned by a business, a company, or a family. I'm not owned by myself. I'm owned by God. I'm set apart for God. As a matter of fact, he's taken his Spirit like an engagement ring and slid that into my heart, and he says, now you're mine. You're my own possession. That does a lot for me. Does a lot for changing my thinking, that I am now, I'm set apart. I'm holy.

Now, the analogy, of course, it breaks down at this point, that I was so enamored, of course, with Carlin for a lot of superficial 16-year-old kind of things, right? It was all just this, you know, you can actually say, well, that was all hormones and attraction and all of that. The reality, though, is that in Scripture, the Bible says his love for you is not based on who you are or your virtues. So there's none of this craziness or fear that maybe God will someday reject me because I'm not as righteous as he once thought I was, or I'm not as lovable as he once thought. It has nothing to do with that.

As a matter of fact, just a mini excursus here in the margin or somewhere in your worksheet, jot down, if you would, Deuteronomy chapter 7. Deuteronomy chapter 7, and put Deuteronomy chapter 9, verse 6. And if we had three-hour services, I'd turn you to every one of these texts that I was thinking of. Let's go there. Yeah, let's do it. I'm always just on the edge of saying, let me just quote it for you. But let's look at these two passages. They are so helpful. I need to know that God wants to own my life. He wants me to see my life as owned by him. That's what it means to be a holy person. Ultimately, judicially and legally, holiness is seen primarily as ownership and secondarily as behavior. As it relates to my holiness, I'm a holy person. Not necessarily because of my behavior, but first and foremost because of my legal status of being owned by God. I'm a set-apart person.

Deuteronomy 7. Did you go there? I love this text. "The Lord, Yahweh, did not set his affection on you or choose you because you were more numerous than the other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. Isn't that good? But it was because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with his mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery and from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt." I mean, this is just great. "Know therefore that Yahweh your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations." That includes us, "of those who love him and keep his commands."

Bottom line is this. He didn't set his love on us because he looked around looking for a date for the prom. He looked to find somebody beautiful to have in his family. He set you apart just because he chooses to set people apart. He chooses to set his affection on people because he just does it. Matter of fact, the explanation almost seems silly in verse number 8. "It was because Yahweh loved you." Now wait a minute. I'm asking why you loved me, and the answer is because he loved you. Do you see that? God's sovereign choice. That's just the way it is.

As a matter of fact, if you think, well, it's got to be partly because I was, you know, a somewhat good catcher. He saw the Christian potential in me. Nothing. Chapter 9. This is the other passage you jotted down. Deuteronomy chapter 9. What did I say? Verse 6. Another great text, a reminder to those people and to us. "Understand then that it is not because of your righteousness that Yahweh your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." I love this because it's basically, I'm not taking you to the prom because you're pretty, because really you're kind of ugly. But I'm taking you because I love you. It's just amazing how God works just to get this all centered around the fact that he chooses to love us because he chooses to love us. And in that we ought to say, wow, I'm chosen by God. I'm set apart for God.

And you know, that set apart is not just a dating thing. Because I remember sitting on the front porch, giving Carlin this little necklace, so hopefully she'd say, oh yes, you're mine, I'm yours. This little high school thing could start. But in reality, it's much more serious than that for God. Because the pledge is not a pledge to go steady. The pledge is a pledge to be family.

As a matter of fact, that's why the next word is an interesting juxtaposition of words. He says, holy brothers, back there in Hebrews chapter 3, verse 1. He calls us holy brothers, and brothers is a term of family. And I love that because the concept of family brings certain things to me. It brings, first of all, in my relationship with God, a sense of security. I'm glad to know I'm not just his friend, I'm his family.

Here's a text we never cross-reference, and I don't know why, maybe because part of the argument is it's a negative argument that Jesus is making. But it's a great verse that you ought to think of often as it relates to the label that God puts on you, brothers. It's found over there in John 8:35. And that one would be worth looking at for sure. So let's just pop into the middle of this argument. And again, we don't quote this very often, but we should, because he's making it, though it's in a negative context, the principle is the principle. And so we can't deny the principle. And I love this in John 8.

Talking about freedom from sin and all that, and slave to sin and blah, blah, blah, but he makes a principle to analogize what he's talking about in the context. But the principle that he uses is always true. I love this. John chapter 8, verse 35, Jesus speaking, is it in red there for you? "Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever." I just love that. There is no way in my heart that I should have a sense of insecurity in the body of Christ. I am a part of God's family, not because of my righteousness, but part of God's family because he chose to love me. He brought me to the place of repentance and faith. He put his Spirit in my life. He put the ring on my finger and he's not taking it back. As a matter of fact, it is a guarantee, a deposit of my coming inheritance. As a matter of fact, that's why all the analogies ramp up to the nineteenth chapter of Revelation when he says that Christ can't wait for the marriage supper of the Lamb. Remember that phrase? The wedding supper of the Lamb's coming. It's all about marriage for us.

Another text. As long as you're in John, are you still in John? Turn to this text as long as we're there. John chapter 10, just two chapters later. You want to talk about security? Here it is. He says, "My sheep," verse 27, John 10:27, "listen to my voice." I mean, that's just the call of the gospel. He sends it out: repent and put your trust in me. And we listen to that. "I know them," Jesus says, "and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Now underline this: "No one can snatch them out of my hand." Nobody's taking these kids away from me.

“My Father,” and if you really doubt that because you’re looking at me as this human being in a dusty robe and I’m from this place in Galilee and you’re thinking, how can this guy be so powerful to keep this band of people forever? He says, then just think of it this way. “My Father, who has given them to me,” this God who dwells in unapproachable light, the all-powerful One of the universe, “is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” Those people aren’t going anywhere.

I love the fact, and we take it for granted all the time, that in Scripture one of the favorite words for us is not Christian, it’s brothers, that we are family, that we are brothers and sisters in God’s family, adopted into his family. You know, the slave, you never know. Maybe he’ll work for God one day. Maybe he won’t. But the children, the sons, we’re in the family forever. We’ve got to get that past our little doctrinal disputes. Because if God chose to love me not because I was righteous, then my afternoon of unrighteousness is not going to get me kicked out of the family. Are you tracking with that theology there? God does it all. And he calls me holy. Not because he’s looking at my track record, but because he’s looking at what he’s done in my life. He has set me apart.

And so my understanding of myself ought to be, I’m God’s. I’m God’s because of God’s sovereign choice. I’m God’s because I’m family now. He uses words like brothers for me. And then look at the next phrase. If you go back to the margin there, I’ve got the text on your worksheet of Hebrews 3:1, or turn back to Hebrews 3:1. There’s one more phrase he uses to describe us, a phrase that ought to control the way I think about myself.

He says this in verse number 1: “Therefore, holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling.” We together, we share in the heavenly. If you’re a Christian, if you have confessed that Jesus is Lord, and that is not only your confession but your controlling belief, that belief controls you, then here’s the thing. We share in this, this heavenly calling.

And what’s ambiguous in the English here is ambiguous in the original text of the Greek New Testament. It’s ambiguous. You could answer this in two ways. Does the calling come from heaven, or is the calling to go to heaven? Can you see that? Which is it? Well, it’s both. I mean, the text doesn’t tell us, the context doesn’t help us here. It’s obviously both, but the one that’s going to have an eternal impact on me is where I end up, which is probably why I think the author had in mind the fact of where we’re going, not where the call came from, but where the call is leading us. And again, that’s the good news. When we read the end of the book, my identity is tied up not only in the fact that God sees me as his own possession, but I’m on a journey to a place where I’m going to dwell forever. And that’s my eternal home, a heavenly calling, where God says, I’m going to dwell among them, and God’s dwelling is going to be among his people.

And we say this all the time. I’ve said it many times from this platform. Our focus has got to be on where we’re going, ultimately where we’re going, eschatologically where we’re going. That’s the most important thing of all. I’m God’s possession, and God wants to live and dwell in a place with me. Think of that John 14 passage. John is a great text as it relates to the concepts of identity and ownership and future home. Remember that great passage in John 14? And if you can’t recite it, we should look at it. John chapter 14. Let’s turn there real quick.

John chapter 14. We want to talk about our future home. Actually, all these things are tied up in this one text. You want to talk about ownership? You want to talk about family? You want to talk about being set apart for God? You want to talk about our future home? John 14:1, he says, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” There’s our word. It’s the word believe.

Trust in me. He said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms, many places to dwell. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I’m going to come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am.”

And that’s an amazing passage. It’s an amazing truth. And if that doesn’t control our thinking, that the world is not our home, my citizenship is not on earth, it’s not about amassing a nice, comfortable life in Orange County, it’s about our future home and storing up treasure in heaven, and it’s about having an identity that’s tied up in God’s possession, in God’s home, in God’s place called the New Jerusalem, then I’ll never think rightly about myself and my life’s going to be filled with wrong decisions till I get back to this. I’m God’s. He owns me. I’m part of his family. There’s permanence there. There’s a future home that he’s taking me to. And in that regard, I can say, the world’s not my home, and a lot of the problems and aches of this life, I’m not going to get down about all that. I’ve got a future home and I’m heading there now.

Think of yourself as God’s. That perspective will change a lot of things about how you act, a lot of things about what you value. It’s going to change a lot about you. But it starts with thinking rightly about yourself.

Then he says this in the middle of verse 1 of Hebrews chapter 3. Speaking of your thoughts and your identity, he says, “Fix your thoughts on Jesus.” Then he gives him two words, two labels here. “The apostle and high priest whom we confess.” And again, the command is to have my thoughts there. So this is more than just a confession. This is the reality of my thinking. And the thinking is that when I think of Jesus, I think of him as the apostle and high priest. Who am I trusting? I’m confessing, I’m saying I believe that he is my apostle and I believe that he is my high priest.

And if it sounds odd to call Jesus our apostle, it ought to, because this is the only place we have it in the New Testament. It’s the only place you’ll find this designation for Christ. But you’re familiar with the word, right? What does apostle mean? Interactive church. What’s it mean? Sent one, one who’s been sent. We look at Peter, James, and John, Paul, they call themselves apostles. They’re sent ones. They’re authorized to represent Christ to the world. Well, Christ says, oh, here, wait a minute. I’m the ultimate apostle. I’m representing God to the world. And he comes on the scene as our apostle.

Then high priest. We learned about this last week. The high priest is not so much interested in this direction from God. The high priest is interested in this service and direction from man to God. An apostle comes from God to man. The priest comes from men to God. And we just learned in the last few verses of chapter 2 in Hebrews that that’s the whole purpose for the incarnation, was for him to represent us to God. That’s why he had to be made like us.

So he has a two-directional ministry here. He is coming from God to us, and he then also is serving God on our behalf, going back from us to God. I like to put it this way. This may sound hyperbolic. This may sound flowery. It doesn’t matter. I’m not trying to be hyperbolic here, but here it comes.

2. Think of Jesus as Your Everything

Number two on your outline. When we think about Christ, let’s just get as broad as we can and as big as we can in this statement. Here’s what you need to think. You need to think of Jesus as your everything. Because the words apostle and high priest sum it up. As a matter of fact, these two

phrases are worth jotting down underneath number two. He is everything I need from God. Did you catch that? He is everything I need from God. And secondly, he is everything that God needs from me, high priest. He is everything I need from God. He's the great apostle, the representative, the Hebrews 1:3, the exact representation of God's nature. He is speaking on behalf of God. He's everything I need from God. He's everything God needs from me, the great high priest. And what did we say last week he needs from me? He needs holiness. He needs to come in the right clothing. He needs sacrifice to cover my sin. He needs to come with the right offering, which is his very body. Remember those things? That's review. Just nod at me, and then you make me think you remembered last week's sermon. Okay? Yes.

He's everything I need as I look at my need before the Father. Those are two great statements. They're two-directional.

The first one, apostle. He's everything I need from God. Think about it. He has come on the scene as the exact representation of God's nature. If I'm saying I need to understand God better, the Bible points us to Christ. Then study Christ. If you don't know what God is all about, study Christ. Well, I need to know what God thinks. If you want to know what God thinks, as God said about Jesus at the transfiguration, remember this? "This is my beloved Son, hear him, listen to him." He'll tell you everything you need to know. He's the great apostle. He is everything I need to know.

What do I need from God? What do we need from God? I need direction from God. God, how am I supposed to live my life? Great. The Bible says, listen, look at Christ. As a matter of fact, he comes on the scene saying, follow me. Follow me. He puts the spotlight on himself, and he points at himself and says, follow me.

Everything I need. What do I need from God? Do I need a demonstration of God's love? Well, of course, I need that. Well, great. The Bible points at Christ, right? Romans 5:8. God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, what happens? Christ dies for us. You want to know if God loves you or not? Study the life, the death of Christ. Keep your focus there.

Everything I need from God, the Bible says, look at Christ. And a lot of us just aren't doing that. And we're groping in this sense in some esoteric search for this invisible connection with God, and God keeps pointing at Christ. And he says, look right here. Everything you need from me is tied up in this person.

That's why the whole Old Testament was looking for this culmination of Old Testament history in the personage of the Messiah, that he would come and he would be everything that they needed from God. And we're saying Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Christ. And if you need something from God, the Bible's saying, listen, it's going to be found in Christ. Everything, the riches of everything we need, the Bible says, is found in Christ.

Here's a great text, John chapter 12. I thought about things this week. What do I want from God? What do I need from God? I think John chapter 12 sums it up so well in verse 26. He says, "Whoever serves me," Jesus speaking, "must follow me." Again, just the point of direction is him. Look at Christ. Look at me. Do what I do. Follow me. As 1 John says, walk as I walk, live as I live. "And where I am, my servant also will be." I'm going to connect with you. It's like that statement, even after his physical ministry was over, he said in the Great Commission there to the twelve, when he leaves them there, he says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The

eleven, by the way, sorry. And he says, I'm going to be with you always. He said the same thing in Acts chapter 1.

And then he says this. "My Father will honor the one who serves me." In other words, here's God. God's not feeling ripped off that you're giving more attention to Jesus this week. Are you tracking with that? A lot of people feel that way. Wow, you know, you guys are so focused on Jesus. Think about it. We're singing about Jesus all the time. We're focusing on Jesus. That's exactly what God wants. And God says, you want blessing from me? Focus on Christ. You want honor from me? Focus on Christ. Follow him. Do what he does. And if you do what he tells you to do, my Father's going to honor you. Just serve Christ.

I think you've got to get comfortable with the fact that our visible connection, our tangible connection, our relational connection with God, which is such a big concept, it's Christ. As a matter of fact, one day when you live in the New Jerusalem, the face on the posters, it's going to be Christ. The focus, again, will be for eternity focused on Jesus Christ. Everything I need from God, I got from him. He's the great apostle. He's the ultimate representative. If in the New Testament times I didn't have a Bible, I want an apostle to tell me what Christ said. See, so I'm looking for an apostle. If I'm sitting here saying I need to hear from God, I'm looking for the apostle, and Christ is the apostle. Everything I need from God, I have in Christ.

And here's the great flip side of that. He calls him the great high priest, the high priest whom we confess. And the flip side is everything God needs from me. Everything God needs from me, I have in Christ. And that probably is the most important central truth of the gospel of Christ, is that everything that God needs from me, I have in Christ.

Turn to this text. This is the only one. We could spend all night here, but turn to Philippians chapter 3 real quick. Philippians chapter 3. Christ is everything God needs from me. Everything. And this is where you will depart from your religious neighbor in your cul-de-sac, or that religious person at work. You and him will go two separate paths when it comes to this statement right here, that he is our great high priest, that Christ is everything God needs from me. Everything.

You know this text, verse 3? Philippians 3:3. He says, "We are the circumcision." This is deep and important Jewish analogy in this text. "We worship by the Spirit of God. We glory in," here it is again, the focus, "Christ Jesus." That's what it's all about for us. Now, here's the flip side. We know we have everything we need from God in Christ, he says, "and we put no confidence in the flesh." You know what that says? That says everything God needs from me is found in Christ.

"Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. In regard to the law, a Pharisee. As for zeal, persecuting the church. If you want to talk about legalistic righteousness and keeping the rules, I was faultless in that."

"But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them..."

What's it say there? You know what the word is, though, right? *Skubalon*. Very good. What's that mean? Poop. So put that in the margin there. I don't know how you consider poop, but that's what

he says. I consider everything on my resume that I brought to the table, I consider it poo-poo, “that I may gain Christ.”

Here’s what it is. It is a swap. It is an exchange. It’s not both-and. You don’t go to Circuit City with that clock radio that doesn’t work and bring it in and say, I want to break this one in half, take half of this one and half of that new one there. And then I’ll have two and it’ll work. That’s not how it works. You take the old, and even if you think it’s shiny and it looks so good, and as to legalistic righteousness it was faultless, you exchange it so that you have the one from God. And everything you need from God, you have in Christ. And everything that God demands from you, you have in Christ. He’s the great high priest.

He says, “And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,” that means the rules, “but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and he goes on and on.

What’s the point? I’m exchanging all of what I am for all of what he’s given me. And what he’s given me is everything that God demands. And in that regard, you and I could sin away, now I know this is, I mean, this is not what the Bible says. It’s not what’s going to happen. But you and I could sin away every other day we have left on this planet, and God would say, I got everything I need from you. Because you got it in Christ.

And I know to push that paradigm is a scary thing, because of course the Bible wants us to live righteously, right? But God doesn’t need another ounce of righteousness from you. Why? Because everything God needed and demanded from you has been delivered in Christ.

That’s not what your neighbor believes about religion and God. You realize that, right? That is not what your friends back east think about what it means to be a Christian. Real Christianity means all that I have is tossed aside, and I don’t care about it anymore because the great high priest has represented me perfectly.

Now, I know that could lead to the charge that if that’s the case, well, who cares what I do then? And that’s exactly where Paul has to go in the book of Romans when he clearly talks about an imputed righteousness from heaven that comes by faith in Christ. It’s exactly where he has to defend the fact. Does that mean we do whatever we want? No. But it does mean anything that is demanded of me from God has been satisfied in Christ.

That’s why the Reformers cried out, Christ alone. It is not about what I bring to the table. It’s about what Christ has done for me. It doesn’t matter how many rules you’ve kept. Everything that God needs from you, he’s provided in Christ. Think of Christ as your everything. Anything you need from the eternal Creator of the universe, look to Christ. Anything God is needing from you, cling to Christ. It comes in Christ. Just make sure your trust is there. That’s what it’s all about.

Is that a belief you check off at the gates of heaven to get in? Boy, it’s so much more than that. Don’t reduce Christianity to that. It’s not a belief that you hold. It’s a belief that holds you. It’s more than a creed. Think of Christ as your everything.

Now, there’s one phrase here, and it’s the middle of verse 1 we didn’t really deal with. We went right past it. Because we read it, and you think, okay, I know what you’re saying. “Fix your

thoughts on Christ.” But that little phrase there, “fix your thoughts on Jesus,” pretty powerful phrase. As a matter of fact, that’s a real powerful word. The word itself, “fix your thoughts on,” is the word, it’s just a little four-letter Greek word. It’s the word to think. And then it’s combined with a preposition that intensifies the word, *kata*, the word down. To think down on this. To think down on this.

You ever seen somebody who’s trying to focus on something and their head physically goes down to examine something? That’s the concept here. Think down on this. It’s almost, it is a mixed, grammarians will tell you, between a visual image of someone focusing on something and a mental image of thinking. And we say it all the time. Matter of fact, when we’re talking about people thinking, we say focus now. Focus is a visual word, not a mental word. And yet the point is, the mixed metaphor is that intensity of saying, I’ve got to look at this. I’ve got to think about this. And it has the sense of a constant and a continuity. Fix. I love the way the NIV does a great job translating. Fix your thoughts here. Put them right here. And make sure they stay here.

3. Think About Jesus More Often

Number three on your outline. Take every superfluous thought, every thought you don’t have to think in some other area, in some other thing, and here’s the thing. Number three on your outline, what we need to do is think about Jesus more often. Think about him more often. Fix your thoughts there. Keep it settled there.

I love the way A.W. Tozer says, when he’s talking about the concept and thinking on God, he says, make it like the raven who was sent out from the ark to fly around, and all he can do is basically just fly back to the ark. Goes around, looks for a plant, fly back to the ark. Fly back to the ark. Tozer does a great job of painting that mental picture, saying, you know, when your thoughts, when you’re free to think about whatever you want, back to Christ. Get your mind back on God, and God is going to point your attention to Christ and stay focused there.

Speaking of hormones, you may say, well, that’s a silly analogy, you and Carlin, because, you know, I’ve been there, I know what it’s like, puppy love, all that, you know, and it is hormone-driven. But you realize all that green fuzzy stuff wears off, right? I know, I’ve already told Carlin, it wears off, right? But you know what has to take the place? It’s a central word in this: love, okay? Because all the emotion of trying to think of other things and work on this paper, but I can’t stop, I got to think about my new girlfriend, see? All of that is replaced with a conscious effort, a commitment of love. See, why is it that my mind is still set on that one girl? Why? Why, because I just can’t stop thinking about her all day? No, because I choose to think about her.

See, that’s why if you go to my office, I got pictures of her up. See, that’s why we take a date night every week. That’s why we have cell phones and we can talk to each other, and we choose to talk to each other throughout the day. It has to be purposeful, and it’s a commitment of love. And we can stay focused on one another as long as there’s an intentional effort to do so.

And so it is with your relationship with God. Because in our relationship with God, sometimes we come to God when we hit bottom, and sometimes we’re dealing with tremendous guilt, and we’re reaching out to God saying, God, deliver me from this. And is that a proper motivation to come to God? Absolutely. Our hearts are broken. We’re crying out to God, and God says, I will forgive you. My resume for yours. Just swap it out. I’ll take all this, nail it to the cross, and it’s done.

And we have this first love that the book of Revelation talks about. And it's wonderful. But then you know what? All that needs to be replaced by a thoughtful commitment to keep my mind settled on that first love. You want to stay focused on Christ, you're going to have to work on it. Unless you're a brand-new Christian, you're going to have to make it a purposeful, conscious effort of love. You have to. That's why we talk about spiritual disciplines. And you can dismiss those as legalistic. But if you don't get up in the morning and spend time with God, your thoughts will not be settled on Christ. You've got to do it. It's a spiritual discipline. Just like dating your wife. Trust me, your heart will not stay there if you do not purposely focus on her. And so it is with God.

So we say, I don't care if you want to call it legalistic. Get up in the morning and spend time with God. At night, turn the TV off. And when it's quiet in your house, spend time with God. My wife and I will stay connected as long as our cell phones keep working, right? That's called prayer.

Here's a great verse for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:21. You can memorize it right now. "Pray continually." Remember that verse? Let's see if you've got it. How does that go? See, went to church, memorized the verse today. Pray continually. You want to stay tight, pick up the spiritual cell phone regularly and talk to God. Pray all the time. Talk to God all the time, and he's going to focus you on Christ. He's going to bring your thoughts back to Christ.

I love this text. It's so good. As a matter of fact, it's worth turning to as we wrap things up here. It's in the Gospel of John. No, no, Gospel of Mark. I'm sorry. Maybe you need this. Maybe you need it on your schedule more often than the women's retreat schedule at CBC. But it's the feeling of retreat. Mark chapter 6. It would be great to be there personally with Christ, and now we are spiritually connected, not physically. We will be physically again one day in the same room together. But this sense of spending this thoughtful time with Christ has got to be intentional.

Here are people wanting to serve Christ, do for Christ. The apostles are going full guns, just 100 miles an hour every day, 24/7. And look at verse number 31. Mark 6:31. "Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he," that's Christ, got some red letters coming up here, "said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.

Maybe it's time for you to do that, because your thoughts, much like the apostles' thoughts, I mean, you're tied up doing all the right things, going to the right church services, making sure you're doing the right, but you know what? You haven't had that time. And I mean it, man, maybe you need to go away, create your own little weekend retreat, and you just say, I've got to spend time with God. And don't do it in a place that's got a TV. Don't do it in a place, just spend time in solitude with God.

You know, we've lost that in our culture. Every single generation of Christians that preceded us had this as part of their spiritual disciplines, to get away with God by themselves to a quiet place to rest and spend time with him. If you haven't done that lately, I suggest it. And maybe a little respite of an hour a day is not enough and you need some extended time. Tune into this thing called fasting. If you haven't done that, get away for a weekend, don't eat, get focused, to have all those desires channeled into one desire. I just want to be with God this weekend. We'll give you a pass from church, and spend time with him.

One more thing, let me throw this in. I talk about pictures on my desk, pictures on my desk, pictures on my bookshelf constantly. There's my wife, right? We don't have that. You notice we don't have

statues up around here. We couldn't anyway, but we own the place. That's, that's, that's not it. You want to know that the picture of Christ that is appropriate in the New Testament? Just jot the reference down. You can read it later. Colossians chapter 3, verse 16. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you." And then here comes the method. Here comes the picture. Do you know the text? It says, "As you teach and admonish one another, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

You know the photo album that God has given us to put up all around our lives? It's called music. And I don't know if you've noticed, the world's got a lot of cruddy music that doesn't take our focus and fix it on Christ. But praise God, gifted people, people like our own Bob Soma, people like a hundred other people that are out there producing good things, take our thoughts, move it on God. Man, if you're not surrounding your life with that, something's wrong.

And it's so easy today. You got a computer at your house? Go on your computer, and you can look at hundreds of Christian stations streamed right through the internet, right to your computer. Upgrade your speakers and turn it on. Turn other stuff off and hear one song after the next, another picture of Christ, another picture of Christ. You need to be praying on the cell phone, you need to be spending time away, you need to have pictures up of Christ. How do you do that? Melodically, I think, these days. God didn't ask us to construct statues or pictures of Christ, but the Bible does tell us to be singing psalms, spiritual songs, hymns to one another with gratitude in our hearts. You've been doing that lately? You want to keep your thoughts fixed on Christ, that's one way to do it.

When I was a kid in my elementary school nurse's office, there was a poster up, some kid with a banana head, and it said, "You are what you eat." Remember that poster? Now, that's not a biblical principle, you realize. And praise God it's not true, or I'd be wearing a Taco Bell wrapper right now. But there is truth to it, right? I mean, just check your triglycerides or your LDLs or HDLs or lipids or whatever. You can go down there. There's an effect. Your body will reflect what you eat. There's a cause-and-effect relationship.

Well, "you are what you eat" is not a biblical verse. But in Proverbs 23, it does say, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." And where your heart and your mind constantly go will have a great effect on your life. And if your Christianity is all about a confession and a creed and a true-false test, and it's a Sunday thing, then your Christianity is not a biblical Christianity.

But if your Christianity, it heeds the call of Hebrews 3 that says keep your thoughts fixed here, who you are in Christ, what Christ has done for you, you know what? It'll affect everything in your life. You know what God's looking for at Compass Bible Church? Not more people that can answer doctrinal questions right. Oh, that's good, and I'm all for it. And let's work on that. But it's people whose hearts and minds are fixed on Christ every day.

It's not about the facts. It's not about holding beliefs. It's about those beliefs really holding us. And that's not going to happen till we get serious about spending some time with God, talking with God regularly, having our lives filled with snapshots of Jesus in the songs that we sing, the things that our hearts connect with melodically. Let's spend some time keeping our focus on Christ this week. And I'll tell you what, by Friday, your life will be transformed. It's a different life. Fight every objection, every distraction. It's a mental battle. Let's fight it this week successfully.

Let's pray.



God, thanks for this reminder from this great text. I know it's just a prelude to a comparison between the great lawgiver, Moses, and Christ. But God, what we learn just by looking at this first verse is that we cannot afford to let our Christianity become simply a creedal yes-or-no, true-or-false test. It has to be a controlling belief, that if we say Jesus is Lord, it changes our lives, it affects our thinking. It's not just what I believe, it's how I think.

So God, I pray that in our lives this week, as we make a conscious effort, maybe we've been Christians for years now, and because of that this is not something that just is emotionally prompted. It's something that has to be prompted by a commitment of love and a thoughtful commitment to get our minds back where they need to be. And God, I pray, like that picture that Tozer painted for us, that our minds would look above the landscape and see there's really nothing worthy for our minds to be on. And when we're free to think about whatever we want to think about, that our minds will settle back on Christ and what he's done for us and who we are in him. So make that a reality for us, God, and may it transform our life. May it affect our lives in powerful ways this week. In Jesus' name, amen.