

CHRIST THE CENTER

Center of My Church

What are you looking for? Is it a church address, a church family or is it Jesus? My answer is found in the title of a song, "Give me Jesus." In the morning when I rise...give me Jesus. When I am alone...give me Jesus. When I die...give me Jesus!

When you get to heaven do you envision a church house on every corner? A Baptist church, a Catholic, a Pentecostal church, and/or a Methodist? Will there be a non-denominational church building or a Jewish synagogue in heaven? I don't think there is going to be a church building in heaven. Praise God! Jesus is going to be there with us. He is the Center of the Church - the called out ones - we are His body - He is our Head. **Revelation 22:4-5 (NIV)** ⁴ *They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.* ⁵ *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.* When we get to heaven, His name will be on our foreheads. The question is - can others see His name in us in the way we are living in the here and now? Christ should be our center, our focus - our "main thing!" - the Risen Christ should be the center/the heart of ME of YOU!

What is my message as part of the church body whose builder and Savior is Christ? My message/your message should be same message as that of the Apostle Paul 2,000 years ago - Christ in me - Christ in you - the Hope of Glory!

READ Colossians 1:24-27 (NIV) ²⁴ *Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* ²⁵ *I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--* ²⁶ *the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.* ²⁷ *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Let's make sure that we understand what Paul meant regarding his own personal suffering. Only the suffering of our Lord Jesus can take away our sins. **John 1:29 (NIV)** ²⁹ *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* Never forget that Jesus is the All-Sufficient Savior. We need no other. Paul was not referring to the sacrificial sufferings that Jesus suffered but instead to his own "afflictions." These afflictions were the pressures of Paul's life with Christ as his center. Paul suffered in his body for Christ's body - the church. It was part of God's plan for the life of Paul after he accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. **Acts 9:15-16 (NIV)** ¹⁵ *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man [Paul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.* ¹⁶ *I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

Following Christ is easier for some than others. I personally have not faced suffering for the sake of the gospel even as some are still experiencing today. From the book of Acts, we understand that Paul was called to great suffering.

We have spoken of mysteries in the Bible many times before. In scripture, mystery is not used in the sense of a modern-day “who-dun-it” mystery. Simply put the mystery that Paul is referring to is an “open secret.” Commentator Herschel Hobbs explains, “God’s purpose to save Gentiles as well as Jews in Christ was a mystery hidden in the mind of God through the ages; but it was revealed in Jesus Christ.” This mystery, a truth undiscoverable except by revelation, long hid, now made manifest - Jesus, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah is the Savior of the entire world. A biblical mystery cannot be discovered through research or reason. The mystery Paul was speaking of could only be revealed through divine revelation - which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.

It was unknown in Old Testament times that God himself would indwell every believer. The indwelling Christ is the believer’s hope of glory. Theodore Epp writes, “On the surface the emphasis of Christ in you may not seem so important. But, when we grasp the significance of this great truth our thinking about Christ and ourselves will be changed and even our prayer life will be changed.” *Galatians 2:20 (NIV)* ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

People often accept Christ as Savior and then hesitate when it comes to making Christ the Lord of their life and this hesitation can last for years - and the delay in making Christ Lord of your life can bring great sorrow. Are we growing spiritually?

READ *Colossians 1:28-2:3 (NIV)* ²⁸ *We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.* ²⁹ *To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* ¹ *I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.* ² *My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,* ³ *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Paul said we should preach Christ. The common word for preach is announce. God is seeking preachers not just to preach sermons. He wants the message of Christ announced day-by-day in the lives we live. We are to be Jesus “with skin on” to those in our world. In Paul’s time, false teachers were rampant. Because of the meaning of “perfect” in the English language, we can be confused regarding what being perfect in Christ literally means. Perfect does not imply sinless perfection, for that is impossible in this life. Perfect in the scripture suggests completeness, maturity, as the sons and daughters of God. Perfect in Christ Jesus - that is what we should strive to be - not free from flaw but growing more like Him as the time draws nearer for us to move into eternity with Him.

Paul was in a physical prison yet he tells the Colossians that he is struggling for them and the Laodiceans and all those that he had not met personally. **Galatians 6:2 (NIV)** ² *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Do you have a burden for the lost and dying world around you? I know and, if you are a follower of Christ you know, that we cannot “will” someone to accept Christ. Accepting Christ as Savior and Lord is an individual and personal choice. However, we can beseech the Lord to keep the Holy Spirit continually working in the non-believer’s life to soften their heart to the gospel.

Our goal in the lives of those who have accepted Christ as Savior should be to help them to become complete and mature in Christ - that is perfect. Believers do this through preaching, warning, and teaching.

When Christ is the center of our own life, the direct outflow will be for us to encourage others. It is so good when you have a “church family” to encourage you and love you. **Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)** ²⁵ *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

United in love - that is how believers should be - **Mark 3:25 (NIV)** ²⁵ *If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.* Family blood lines are united through something called DNA. The blood of Christ is the DNA that unites the body of believers, Christ’ children together.

Riches in Christ Jesus - **Philippians 4:19 (NIV)** ¹⁹ *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* The story is told of a young pastor who came to a church that had been accustomed to raising its annual budget by means of suppers, bazaars, and the like. He told his officers he could not agree with their program. "Let's pray and ask God to meet every need," he suggested. "At the end of the month, pay all the bills and leave my salary till the last. If there isn't enough money for my salary, then I'm the one who suffers, and not the church. But I don't think anybody is going to suffer!" The officers were sure that both the pastor and the church would die, but such was not the case. Each month every bill was paid, and at the end of the year there was a surplus in the treasury for the first time in many years.

We tap into our Father’s riches in glory when we learn to live by faith. When we learn this biblical truth for ourselves, we can then do our part in sharing this truth with others.

Many become “wise in the ways of the world.” It is more important to access the wisdom of God and use His Wisdom to keep us centered on Him in our daily walk. Are we walking in light?

READ Colossians 2:4-7 (NIV) ⁴ *I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.* ⁵ *For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and*

delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. ⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Warren Wierbse points out, "In the Christian life, we never stand still: we either go forward or gradually slip backward. Let us go on to maturity!"

Satan is deceptive and he will do all he can to lead believers astray. He does not want you to make Jesus Lord of your life. Don't be distracted by Satan when he cries out, "Look over there." Don't hesitate to do the Lord's work just because Satan may whisper in your ear, "You're not adequate for the task." Don't allow Satan to distract you by falling back into old habits. Don't be distracted just because Satan's emissary is whispering to you through the voice of a so-called associate, "you haven't changed."

In verse 7, Paul gives us a good outline of how we can continue to walk in the light. We will call the points the plant, the building, the school, the river.

1. The Plant - You must root your plants and trees. When you buy tomato plants in the spring, you don't leave them lying on top of the soil. You dig them into the ground and water them in order to reap the harvest crop. *Psalm 126:6 (NIV)* ⁶ *He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.*

2. The Building - We moved into an "old house" in 1975 and we have been building up our house ever since our purchase. If we had not continually built our house up, it would not be as sound as it is today. We must not neglect our spiritual house - the temple of God. In a house remodeling project, you will quickly find that one project leads to another and that is just the way it should be as we work in building our spiritual house. We cannot just make a profession of faith and be baptized and determine that our work is done. Our work is just beginning.

3. The School - Every parent knows how important education is for their child. Spiritual education is even more significant in the life of the believer. Christians who study the Word become established in the faith. Satan has a difficult time deceiving the Bible-taught believer.

4. The River - in heavy periods of rain it is not uncommon for the river to overflow its banks. *John 7:38 (NIV)* ³⁸ *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.* Is Christ in you, in your body, in your church, a shallow trickle of water, or are you allowing Him to become an overflowing mighty river in your life? A grounded, growing, grateful believer will not be led astray.

In the morning when I rise...give me Jesus. When I am alone...give me Jesus. When I die...give me Jesus!