

The danger of a half learnt Christ

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[0 : 00] And now we are going to turn to our reading, the passage that Terry will be preaching on later on. That's in Paul's letter to the Colossians, which you'll find on page 983.

Page 983, Paul's letter to the Colossians and reading part of chapter 1. Rupert and Terry have been preaching through this book together on the Wednesday Lunchtime Bible talks. I think in politics you would call that a balanced ticket. And if any of you have heard any of these, I've heard some of them, they've been tremendously good. And I look forward very much to hearing this one, which I missed because of being on holiday. So let's read the scriptures then. Colossians chapter 1, verse 15.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on heaven, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you a holy and blameless and above reproach before him. If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts. I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Paul's letter to the Colossians, which you will find in page 983 of the Pew Bible. 983. And as you do so, let me say a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the opportunity to gather here this morning to be taught and instructed from your word. We thank you for our young folks at Bible class who have already received instruction this morning and who now join us for this part of the service. We thank you for our other younger children who are at various rooms throughout the building receiving instruction from your word and for us here too. So Father, whether downstairs or in here, whether to young folks or to older folks, we pray that in our time together this morning, you would teach us the sufficiency and the supremacy of Jesus Christ. And to that end, we pray that you would make the book live to us, O Lord.

[3 : 37] Lord, show us yourself within thy word. Show us ourselves and show us our Savior and make the book live to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. I wonder if you saw or you read the story that appeared in our newspapers a couple of weeks ago concerning some of the residents of the White Craigs area of Glasgow. It was reported that some of the residents of the White Craigs area have been the victims of the awful crime of identity theft.

Their mail, their post had been intercepted or stolen from the mailboxes at the end of their driveways. And the information contained in these letters enabled the criminals to build an identity in the victims' names and to obtain credit cards and other credits. These criminals then bled the new accounts for every bit of credit they could get. One victim was stung to the tune of 15,000 pounds by the ruthless gang who used his bank account details to rip off the massive sum. Now one of the things involved in identity theft fraud is that assets that are rightfully yours are stolen from you without you even being aware that it is happening. The term identity theft was first used in 1964, but the crime is not new. Spiritual identity theft has been employed by the devil against generations of God's people.

His aim? To steal the believer's identity in Jesus Christ and in so doing wrecking their faith. The method that he employs? Through false teaching. The Colossians were in danger of falling victim to this crime, this scheme of the devil.

And having their identities in Jesus Christ stolen. In verses 1 to 14, Paul begins his letter by affirming that genuine Christian growth has taken place at Colossae. Paul gives thanks that they have got going in the gospel.

[5 : 52] chapter 1 verse 3. And that they exhibit those genuine Christian hallmarks of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, love for all the saints, and all because of verse 5, the hope laid up for you in heaven.

But Paul is not content that they have come to faith in Jesus Christ. So Paul prays chapter 1 verse 9 and following that they would keep growing in the gospel. The apostle Paul had had never met the Colossians, chapter 2 verse 1. No, the church had been planted by Epaphras. Chapter 1 verse 7. Faithful Epaphras, who was one of their own townspeople. Chapter 4 verse 12.

It's commonly believed that Epaphras had come to faith in Christ when Paul had been preaching at Ephesus. Acts chapter 19 records that for two years the apostle Paul preached Christ.

And during this time all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Epaphras had come to faith during this time. And after he came to faith he came home and preached the gospel in his hometown.

And people believed and a church was planted. The Colossians had come to genuine Christian faith. Of that there was no doubt. Everything they had learned was good.

[7 : 21] Everything they had learned was right. It was proper. And it was true. But there were gaps in their understanding. In fact, there were gaping holes in who they believed and understood Jesus Christ to be.

And all that he had done. The Colossians were in the same vulnerable position as any new or young or untaught Christian.

And that vulnerable position is this. The danger of a half-learned Christ. The danger of a half-learned Christ.

Yes, they were genuine Christian believers. Yes, they understood something of the Lord Jesus Christ identity and his work. But they didn't understand the full truth.

Nor did they understand all the implications of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. If you read through the Apostle Paul's letters, you will see that this is the real problem in all of the churches.

[8 : 22] The danger of a half-learned Christ. For when you have a half-learned Christ, then you can be gullible and open to all sorts of teaching. Teaching that sounds right.

Teaching that sounds right, but is in actual fact wrong and absolutely dark and sinister. The Colossians faced the very real danger of a half-learned Christ.

The issue at Colossae was this. There were these false teachers, often called Gnostics. And that word Gnostics means learned, to have knowledge.

These Gnostics claimed superior knowledge. They claimed to be in the know. And they were peddling this new spirituality, which was something akin to New Age spirituality, that gathered ideas from here, there, and everywhere.

Offering a spiritual fullness that had not been previously enjoyed by the young Colossian believers. They were proclaiming that mere Christianity was not enough.

[9 : 27] That Jesus Christ was somehow insufficient. Insufficient on his own to give believers fullness. And that faith in Jesus Christ had to be supplemented.

It needed something added in order for a fuller experience and greater liberation to be enjoyed.

These false teachers were not telling the Colossians that what they had was wrong.

No. They were telling them that what they had was right, but it was insufficient. They were saying things like, hey, you've made a good start, but you could do better, you know.

You have a good foundation, but you need something else. And we can give it to you. So what the Apostle Paul does in the verses that we have before us this morning is to begin to teach the Colossians the full truth about Jesus Christ.

He teaches them about the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. It doesn't get any bigger than Jesus Christ. It doesn't get any better than Jesus Christ.

[10 : 32] You can't get better than faith in Jesus Christ himself. And friends, if we know less about Jesus Christ than what the Apostle Paul gives and teaches here, then we risk in our own spiritual

lives the vulnerability and the danger of a half-learned Christ.

So firstly, in verses 15 to 18, the Apostle Paul teaches that Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of all creation.

Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of all creation. Paul in these verses in an absolutely exquisite and wonderful way teaches the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

That there is nothing like Jesus Christ. There is no one like Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has no equal. Paul here describes Jesus Christ in a way that should lead the Colossians and us not to debate Jesus Christ or to discuss Jesus Christ, but should lead us to trust, to marvel, to glory in, and to worship Jesus Christ.

Paul is declaring to us that Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of all creation. Let's look at how Paul conveys this to us. He tells us in three ways.

[11:58] Firstly, Paul says, Jesus Christ is the unique Lord. He is the unique Lord. Four times in these verses, Paul says, He is.

Jesus Christ is. Verse 15. He is the image of the invisible God. He is, verse 17, before all things. He is, verse 18, the head of the body, the church. And again in verse 18, He is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead.

And you can see what Paul was saying. That the same Jesus Christ who was born at Bethlehem, who walked this earth, and who died on the cross, is none other than the eternal God.

The eternal God made manifest, made visible in this world in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the author of creation and the head of the church, which is the new creation.

[13:00] He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is the resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ has undone the work of Adam, breaking the curse brought about by Adam's fall.

Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection from the dead for all who belong to him. These words make me think of the words spoken by Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon.

Do you remember the words he spoke as he stepped out onto the moon? Armstrong said, one small step for a man, but one giant leap for mankind. That's what Paul is saying here.

when Jesus Christ stepped out of the tomb, it was one small step for a man, but one giant leap for mankind, opening the way to a new order of reality for man.

Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is in himself God and ruler of all. To say anything else is ridiculous and makes a nonsense out of who Jesus Christ is.

[14:07] But not only is Jesus Christ the unique Lord, he is secondly the Lord of all. Six times in his many verses, Paul uses the word all.

All creation, all things. All things were made by him and all things are ruled and governed by him.

As John puts it in his gospel in chapter 1 verse 3, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

Or as J.B. Phillips puts it in his paraphrase, all creation took place through him and none took place without him. He is the unique Lord and he is the Lord of all.

And it's easy to see here from the language that Paul uses that Paul is seeking to convey to us that not only is Jesus Christ the unique Lord and the Lord of all, but that he is also the center of the universe.

Look at all the words that come before the word him. Verse 16, By him all things were created. All things were created through him and for him.

[15:17] Verse 17, In him all things hold together. Verse 20, Through him to reconcile to himself all things. Can you see how much Paul is saying about Jesus Christ?

By him and through him and for him and in him and through him. Jesus Christ is the rightful center of the whole universe and everything that exists, everything that exists, whether visible or invisible, has been created and is sustained by Jesus Christ and it all centers around the Lord Jesus Christ.

But people can't stomach this. It's often said that the center of the world is a crowded place because so many of us think that the world, the universe, centers around us.

But no, says Paul, Jesus Christ is the one whom the whole universe exists. Jesus Christ is the one around whom the universe centers. And Jesus Christ is the one through whom the universe is upheld and sustained.

So then, friends, the implication is this. Jesus Christ is not an add-on to life. He is not a bolt-on. He does not take place alongside all your other philosophies and religions.

[16:39] No, Jesus Christ is life. He is the offer of life. As Peter said when he was preaching in Acts chapter 2, Jesus Christ is God. That is what Paul is saying.

Jesus Christ is the maker, the sustainer, and the ruler of life. Without Jesus Christ, there would be no purpose. Without Jesus Christ, there would be no meaning to life.

In fact, without Jesus Christ, the whole universe would cease to exist. It was Pascal who said, Jesus Christ is the center of everything and the object of everything, and he who does not know him knows nothing of the order of the world and nothing of himself.

Jesus Christ is as central to life as a ball in a game of football. Without the ball, there is no game. A life without Jesus Christ is simply going through the motions.

Those who were trying to take the young Colossian believers at Colossae captive were saying, you come to us and we will take you to a higher level. No, they won't, says Paul, for there is no higher level than Jesus Christ.

[17:54] It can't get any higher than Jesus Christ. They were wanting the young Colossian believers to supplement their faith in Jesus Christ by adding rituals and experiences.

I once heard it said that the only sum in the world where to make an addition is actually to make a subtraction and that sum is this. Jesus Christ plus anything is actually to take away from Jesus Christ.

For this is what always inevitably happens. The thing that you have added always ends up becoming more important than Jesus Christ. The thing that you have added is made much of while Jesus Christ is sidelined and downplayed.

Yes, faith in Jesus Christ, but you must speak in tongues to be a proper Christian. Faith in Jesus Christ is sidelined while speaking in tongues then becomes the main thing.

Yes, faith in Jesus Christ, but you must be a member of the Roman Catholic Church, the mother church, to experience the full Christian experience. Faith in Jesus Christ is again sidelined and being a member of the Roman Catholic Church becomes the main thing.

[19:09] And friends, I'm not being bigoted or sectarian here. My family are all Roman Catholics. My background is Roman Catholic. You would only have to look at the tie to know that. But what I'm telling you is the truth.

Being part of the Roman Catholic Church becomes the main thing. And faith in Jesus Christ is sidelined. Yes, faith in Jesus Christ, but you must be baptized by full immersion to be a proper Christian.

Mode of baptism then becomes the main thing as faith in Christ is sidelined. Yes, faith in Jesus Christ, but you need to be Presbyterian and hold to Reformed theology and teach the Bible systematically by going through book by book.

Again, the type of church government becomes the main thing. Your theological position or the style of preaching you adopt while faith in Jesus Christ is sidelined.

Now, friends, hear what I'm saying. Type of church government, theological position, and style of preaching do matter. But I hope that none of us here believes that these are the main thing.

[20:17] Add to faith in Jesus Christ. No, says Paul. How can you add to the Creator? Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation. What can you add to the Creator?

Jesus Christ is the Supreme Lord of all creation. And secondly, in verses 19 and 20, not only is Jesus Christ the Supreme Lord of all creation, salvation.

Jesus Christ is the sufficient Lord of salvation. Jesus Christ is the sufficient Lord of salvation. Jesus Christ is the sole reconciler.

Verse 19, Paul writes, in Jesus Christ, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Remember, it was this issue of fullness that was unsettling the Colossians.

Those seeking to take the young Colossian believers captive were playing down Jesus. They were saying that Jesus Christ on his own wasn't enough or that the Colossians didn't have enough.

[21:23] No, says Paul, fullness is found in Jesus Christ. All the fullness of God dwell in Jesus Christ. That all of God filled all of Jesus.

That deity is to be found nowhere else and in no one else. It is all in Christ. Jesus said so himself to his disciples.

If you have seen me, then you have seen the Father. All of God dwell in all of Jesus Christ. His sufficiency and salvation is linked to his supremacy.

Because he is the God-man, he and he alone can reconcile all things to himself. Christ alone is the image of the invisible God.

Verse 15 Christ alone rules over and sustains the universe. Verse 15 to 18 and only through Christ's death alone. Verse 20 can there be peace with God.

[22 : 23] There is no room for anyone else. You see friends, that's the reason the creator entered his creation. The creator came in order to be the savior in order to deal with the deep and eternal enmity that exists between God and us.

Verse 21 natural man is alienated, estranged from God, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. But our main problem is not our hostility towards God, but God's hostility towards us.

It's not that God doesn't love us, he does. But because we have rejected his rule, we have rejected his love, God has become angry with us. But in and through Jesus Christ shed blood on the cross, he has made peace.

Verse 20, Jesus didn't die to change how God felt about us. No, God loved us anyway. No, Jesus' death changed God's treatment of us.

No longer objects of God's wrath because Jesus Christ has turned God's wrath away from us and he has absorbed God's wrath for us, making peace for the blood of his cross.

[23 : 46] That's the words in the hymn in Christ alone, isn't it? Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied on the cross, Jesus Christ facing God's judgment on our behalf, taking God's wrath for us, dealing with God's hostility towards us, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ in salvation, winning, securing peace with God on our behalf on the cross, the hands of the one who created us, being pierced by nails in the cross in order to redeem us.

It's mind blowing. It's absolutely wonderful, isn't it? Friends, we need to have this burned into our hearts and minds and lives, for if we don't, we will live with the danger of a half-learned Christ.

Oh, I didn't realize that Jesus Christ was so sufficient. I thought I needed something else, something more. Jesus Christ has provided everything I need.

I knew he was good, but I didn't realize just how good he was. have you grasped the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and salvation?

Friends, Jesus Christ hasn't given us a starter for ten in order that we can get going and finish the job off with ritual ceremonies, experiences, and works.

[25 : 14] No. Jesus Christ has provided full salvation. He is the sufficient Lord of salvation. He reconciles all things.

Nothing or nobody lies outside of his work. But friends, this is not universalism. No, this is not teaching that everyone in the end will be saved.

No, not everyone in the end will be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ said so himself. This isn't the teaching of universalism, but teaching that all who will be saved will only be saved through Jesus Christ alone.

There is no one else capable of doing this. He is the sufficient Lord of salvation. Have you put your trust in him? Salvation can be found nowhere else.

the words written by Paul in verses 15 to 20 would not be out of place in a systematic theology book. But remember, we are not reading them in a systematic theology book.

[26 : 24] No, we are reading them in a letter. A real letter that was written to a real church. A real church full of young, genuine Christian believers.

A young church that were under the very real threat of being taken captive and coaxed, enticed away from Jesus Christ. Which is why Paul writes, as he does in verses 21 to 23, that the Colossians would be established and firm in the faith.

That they would be established and firm in the faith. Paul writes encouraging them to remain steadfast and to stick with the gospel.

This is the Jesus Christ you have received, supreme in creation and sufficient in salvation. So do not be moved from him. Continue in the faith, the faith once delivered to all the saints.

Be stable and steadfast. Don't shift. Don't shift from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation. You were once God's enemies, estranged and alienated from him.

[27 : 40] But God reconciled us to himself, verse 22, through Christ's death. And one day, one day your salvation will be complete. You will be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

It is absolutely wonderful. But the apostle Paul gives a warning. you will only be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before him if indeed you continue in the faith.

Friends, that's why Paul was writing. That's how much is at stake. Paul doesn't want them to be taken in and taken captive by these false teachers and in so doing being eternally shipwrecked.

Paul writes that they would realize and understand the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. That he is all and that he has accomplished all that is necessary for full salvation.

Jesus Christ has done everything already. If you have him, you have it all. You need no more. You have his spirit. it. So don't listen to the voices that tell you you need something more or that something else needs to be done.

[29 : 05] Jesus Christ is all you need. Jesus Christ is supreme and sufficient in all his ways. He has no equal. He rules and reigns over the entire universe and he is sufficient to present you holy, blameless, and above reproach before God the Father.

So continue in him and don't be moved ever. Be stable and steadfast in him and do not shift from the hope of the gospel that you heard.

Do not shift from it ever. Let us pray. Amen.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Father, we ask that you would help us to see you more clearly, that we would love you more dearly, and that we would follow you more nearly, day by day.

[30 : 23] Fill us with a sense of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and fill us with all the riches that arose in him. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.