

The Face of Jesus Christ

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Christ Church - Moscow, ID

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INTRODUCTION:

It is our custom to have a “state of the church” message every year around this time. Sometimes the message has to do with the church nationally, and other times the point is more local, pertaining to our own congregation. This year I want to focus on this congregation, and the point of this message is to reiterate some of our basic distinctives. What are we about? What are we trying to emphasize?

THE TEXT:

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe” ([Phil. 3:1](#)).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The church at Philippi had particular challenges, and Paul addressed them all by urging them to rejoice. This is a response that is always appropriate because God is always sovereign and God is always good. Not only is it appropriate for Christians to rejoice all the time, it is appropriate to bring repeated reminders to them to do so. To repeat the same exhortations should not be a grief to ministers, and it should be received as a means of keeping us all safe.

TWO KINDS OF DISTINCTIVES:

One kind of distinctive arises from what we believe the Scripture teaches and requires of all believers. We focus on it because we believe that all believers should focus on it. This would be a principled distinctive, coupled with an ecumenical invitation.

A second kind of distinctive would arise from our particular circumstances. These are tactical circumstances, tailored to the life and situation of each congregation. Are we in an urban setting or in a small town? Should we build this kind of building or that kind? Should we build a Christian school or is there already a good Christian school? These are tactical questions.

A third kind of distinctive is sinful. This is what happens when a group tries to separate itself from other Christians through various kinds of doctrinal vainglory or ministry showboating. This is what the disciples were arguing about on the road ([Mk. 9:34](#)). We are not immune to this temptation (why would we be?), and so we want to resist it everywhere we find it. The place to look is under your breastbone.

That said, what are our principled distinctives?

CORPORATE WORSHIP:

We worship God because He is worthy. We do not do it for any of the results that might come about from it. Rather, we do everything else for the results it might have in helping us to glorify God. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” ([Rev. 5:12](#)).

Worshiping God is not a means to another end. Worshiping God is the highest calling that a human being has, or that the entire human race has. It requires no other justification. Whatever you do, it should drive you to this great end. Whatever you do, it should culminate here, in the glorification of God. There is great wisdom in the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism here. This is our chief end.

Dangers: one danger is that you make something you call worship into a great big deal, but it is not spiritual worship at all. Another danger is that of trying to get worship to “do” other things, like evangelism. But this is backwards.

Components: Learning the structure of covenant renewal worship, growing in our musical wisdom and literacy, teaching your families the importance of worship, weekly communion, and practical Bible teaching.

BASIC DISCIPLESHIP IN COMMUNITY:

We want to emphasize basic and foundational issues in our teaching—personal piety as measured by relational piety (1 John 4:20). We want our doctrine to revolve around practical Christianity, Christian living that is meant to be lived. This is why there are recurring themes in the teachings, conferences, books published, and so on. We emphasize things like confession of sin, dealing with bitterness, maintaining relationships, how to read your Bible, the importance of Christian education, and so on.

Dangers: the danger here is that of reducing everything to a moralistic or legalistic approach. But the biblical approach is always credenda before agenda.

Components: Understanding the Apostles Creed, true Christian education for Christian kids, parish studies, having our lives intertwined in koinonia fellowship, and being driven by an eschatological optimism.

WORLDVIEW EVANGELISM, OUTREACH, CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT:

Jesus is Lord, and this means that He is relevant to all things. No area of human endeavor lies outside His authority. Our evangelism is not an attempt to helicopter victims out of a disaster area, but rather is the work of rebuilding a disaster area. Everything is relevant, and everything is related to Jesus.

The Christian faith has cultural ramifications. The Christian faith is political. The Christian faith is public. We have no business taking this light of His and putting it under our own bushel.

Dangers: one danger is the obvious one of calling it cultural engagement when we just drift along with whatever the world is dishing up. Another is the cowardice of shutting up because of the pc police. Or that of using a Jesus stamp on all of your personal prejudices.

Components: real Christian education (again), and a willingness to get out of our comfy little ghetto. In order to learn cultural engagement, we have to engage. We must not capitulate, and we must not run away. We must engage. This means knowing, loving, and praying for non-believers—without trying to become like them.

CONCLUSION:

In the coming year, and in the time after that, there will no doubt be a number of times when we have practical and tactical decisions to make. A good example would be the issues surrounding the building of our new sanctuary. We have been without one since this congregation was established in 1975. We have a church that we planted just ten years ago that has its own building now, and we still don't, which is the coolest thing in the world.

But when we come to build our own building (or if we do anything else), make sure that everything is brought back to these three areas. How will this help us do that? Unless we make a point of doing it this way, we will be like a crotchety bachelor deciding to get married in his late forties. What could go wrong?



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