

THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS

December 26, 2021

Hebrews 2:9-18

Without Christ, Christmas is just another secular holiday. The world seems to see Christmas solely for gift giving, shared fellowship, family bonding, and romantic holidays. It is true that even Spurgeon encouraged Christians to celebrate more than celebrating less. However, every time we take out Christ in Christmas, it diminishes the real purpose of the day.

The work of evil tries to lure and deceive us especially during this day. It makes you think that you are insignificant in the society. The devil tries to make you jealous or envy those who have whole family while yours is broken. It creates an illusion that everything should be about you and not others. It tries to break your family, your church, your relationship with others. And the more you give in to these deceitful lies of the enemy, the more Satan rejoices.

Let us not give Satan another reason to celebrate through our pain and suffering. Rather, let us recalibrate the reason why we are celebrating Christmas.

Suffering: General suffering is a mystery, but Christ calls us to be faithful despite pain and suffering. Sufferings brought by injustices, oppression, evil, and indifference are present in this fallen world. This is explicit both in the Old Testament focusing on the suffering of Israel and in the New Testament shown in Christ and the early church's suffering.

Despite this presence of suffering, God calls us to trust in Him, be faithful just as how Job was, and continue to walk wisely and righteously. God promises that He will be with His people, never leave them, and help them by the Spirit's comfort and protection. By God's grace in Christ, we long for the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God where pain and suffering are no longer existing.

Heart Circumcision: Circumcision signifies God's covenantal relationship with the Israelites. Woodbridge explained that it is part of God's chosen people and their national identity (physical). Yet, in the New Testament, this was more of spiritual obedience than physical circumcision. It signifies commitment and regeneration (heart). Thus, the debate in the early Church concluded that it is no longer required to perform physical circumcision since the spiritual circumcision of the heart already took place. Circumcision of the heart is not connected, though it clarifies, with the Abrahamic circumcision of the flesh. Rather, it is linked with the new covenant where God writes His covenant in our hearts as the Spirit regenerates His elect.

Righteousness, Justice, and Justification: Righteousness is associated with justice, or it is an applied justice. While justice is the necessary distribution of good to those right deeds and retribution for evil or wrong deeds. Seifrid reiterated that it is wrongful to see a person as the one justified. Rather, he pointed to Christ as the one where righteousness dwells and been justified. Believers, therefore, are mere sharers of Christ's death and resurrection; wherein Christ is the source of our shared righteousness. Christ is the pinnacle of justice and righteousness and believers are co-sharers of this righteousness because of Christ's finished work on the cross. Thus, apart from Christ, one can never attain the fullness of righteousness and justice.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The vast meaning of the term "forgive" is rich. It pertains to covering up, to pardon, to be merciful, to send away or take away, and more. Forgiveness is a prominent theme in the OT: God covering Adam and Eve after the fall, God's saving act in the times of Noah, with the patriarchs, the kings, and the whole nation of Israel. This extends to the NT's salvific history in redeeming and blessing all the nations through Israel.

It is grounded in God's mercy, the greatness of His goodness to those repentant people. Those who cry for mercy, humble themselves showing a contrite heart and turning away from sin to God. Yarbrough tells that the flow is usually: faith-repentance-forgiveness. But in an eschatological sense, Christ's work—death and resurrection—is the objective means of forgiveness. This forgiveness does not only secure redemption but also transforms the heart of a person to pursue godliness. The author proposes that this divine forgiveness is not limited in vertical reconciliation: God and humanity, but also horizontally: believers and community.

Atonement: This is God's saving act for His people. An atonement act is a manifestation of one's humility showing his contrite heart to God. The need for atonement is either to appease or reconcile humanity from God's wrath and judgment. As an act of His redeeming work, God initiates and provides for atonement.

Yarbrough explained it as both expiation and propitiation for the sin of humanity. Thus the Old Testament manner of atonement sacrifice was a foreshadow of Christ's redemptive eschatological sacrifice for the whole humanity.

Comfort: Comfort both in the Old Testament and the New Testament is in a manner of consolation, encourage, sympathize, and sojourn with someone in grief or experiencing melancholy. In the NT, Paul emphasizes that full consolation is found in the word of God, making its proclamation essential to those who are weary and troubled. It is also known traditionally that the Spirit is a comforter, but Brewer argued that a more accurate interpretation is the Spirit as an advocate or paraclete. Nevertheless, a person who experiences deep trouble, sorrowful moment, or loss of someone can always rely and rest in the promises of God.

Assurance: God has been in the business of assuring His elect. Still, in the Old Testament God's promises, encountering His people, and showing signs and wonders were His way to assure His covenantal relationship with Israel. It is understood both in the OT and the NT as God's gift. A reflection of His grace to demonstrate the certainty of one's faith. It is best understood as God's act of letting His children be confident, have peace of mind, and rest in Christ by the Spirit.

Conclusion:

At the end of the day, the real reason for Christmas is Christ—the Second Person of the Trinity—preexistent, eternal, and Lord, willingly chose to become fully human, in order to save humanity from the wretchedness of their sin. That is why we celebrate Christmas; it brings us Hope. Once again, Christmas is a story of second chances, anyone can be whole again. Anyone, have the opportunity to be redeemed from their sin. Christmas is an act of grace.

The Christ of Christmas is not just the Savior of the Ancient past, but still the Redeemer and Lord of this present generation. Hope is a person, indeed.

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