

V. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia—Seven Distinctives
“#2: Gospel-Driven and Christ Exalting Ministry, Part 2”
Selected texts
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What is a solid church – a God-honoring, Christ-exalting church and what does it look like? This series on the seven distinctives of the church is tied into our series on revival. How is it tied in? Revival is not a one-time experience for it is a movement of the Spirit of God restoring a believer and the church back to where it ought to be to serve Christ. So concerning the church, where ought it to be? We are to return to what Christ says when He says ‘I will build My church’ so the Architect has the blueprint. These seven distinctives are affirming Christ’s blueprint that by revival He restores us to embrace and to live as we would serve, honor, love and follow Him, not only personally but in the context of His church.

We are on the second distinctive and these distinctives come in couplets that are united together. The first distinctive was the church is to be known for Biblical faithfulness and confessional integrity. The second half is Gospel-driven and Christ-centered or Christ-exalting. Do you see how the two couplets work together? If we are Biblically faithful then God has spoken and what we are doing is listening to His Word. God’s Word is inerrant and our confessions are not inerrant but our confessions are a distillation of what we believe God has said. That is important. Satan attacked in the Garden when he said ‘has God said?’ and the Scripture is what God has said. The Bible tells us itself that God has finally spoken in His Son. He is still illuminating but He has finally spoken for His Word is inerrant, complete, sufficient and infallible for His church.

When we make our confessions we are telling the world that this is a distillation of what we believe God has said. It is not exhaustive, inerrant, or sufficient but it is our attempt to confess to the world. The Bible tells us that the church is built upon the Word and the church is built to be the buttress, foundation, pillar and support of the Word. So basically we are answering every generation and Satan ‘yes God has said, He hasn’t stuttered and here is what He has said. We most assuredly believe these things and this is our most common confession.’

The essence of most any confession, what Paul identifies as what is of most importance, is the Gospel. So we are Gospel driven. Our faithfulness to the Word of God means we’re going to confess to the world what we believe and that confession will be the Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ. And everything else that we confess takes its cue, its meaning and its power from the power of that Gospel. That means if we are Gospel driven then that brings us what we will cover in this study and that is we are to be Christ-centered because the Gospel is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These first two distinctives are making a clear statement which is this; in a church that is built by the profile of our Architect and Head of the church, Jesus Christ, the One who purchased the church with His own blood, then the Word of God is going to define our mission, message and ministry. I believe that is crucial because right now when a culture attempts to marginalize the church the church wants to be a piece of the cultural furniture, having its place in the culture because the church doesn’t want to be marginalized and there is always at moments when the culture, in a post Christian era, begins to push the church to the boundaries and outside of the

culture where it no longer sees it as a culture shaping institution but also not seeing it belonging in the culture, out of the public square.

The tendency is to seek to be accepted and relevant. Then all of a sudden it is not the Word that defines our message, mission, ministry and methods but the culture. There is a place to contextualize. We begin with the Word of God that tells us our message, mission, ministry and then we land our location and our generation. But it's a short trip from speaking in terms to minister for the culture to understand then speaking on the terms that the culture demands. You can spot it as churches begin to confront only the sins the culture says we can confront as we begin to knock the jagged edges and angles off of the Gospel, the exclusivity of the cross. We begin to back away from Biblical commands of Biblical ethics, sexuality, marriage, roles and relationships because the culture has no place for that.

We want to be accepted so we find a way. First, we do it by saying 'the Bible is not saying that' and before long we're not even saying what the Bible says. That is why the first distinctive is so important that the Word of God is there through the confession to define our mission. This is our mission, our message, our ministry and our methods and this is what we're here for. Our God has given them to us in His Word.

Secondly, Christ must have His rightful place. He is the Firstborn of the Creation. He is the head of the church. He is the Firstfruits of the resurrection. He is the ascended Savior Christ the Lord. He is preeminent. If there is any place in this world where Christ is to be honored, it is in His church. God uses churches but every church labors at never being the focus of people but the church that God uses is the church that wants to make sure people are focused upon Christ. Christ uses laborers and Christ alone is exalted. Our most notable example is John the Baptist. There is no man born greater among men than John the Baptist according to Jesus yet He says I must decrease and Christ must increase. Christ has His rightful place in the church. This is what we'll be looking at in this study.

We will focus on being Christ-centered and how this is interwoven with the first two distinctives. We are to be Biblically faithful and have confessional integrity. So if we are to be faithful to the Word of God who would be preeminent in our faithfulness to the Word of God? It would be the Scriptures for the Scriptures bear witness to Christ and Christ bore witness of His place in the Scriptures. What is the number one confession recorded in the Scripture of the early church? Jesus is Lord! The confession was Christ-centered. If we are confessing individually as members of the church of Christ, Romans 10:9–10 says *[9] if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* Christ is to have His place of preeminence, prominence and proclamation.

We come to this Christ-centered dynamic of a church that is Gospel driven and Christ exalting, so why do we come to that? There is also one warning I want to give you in this. When we looked at the couplet of Gospel driven and Christ-centered we started with two texts. One was I Corinthians 15 that says the Gospel is historical, Biblical, verifiable and born witness in the Scripture and by those who were there at the resurrection of Christ. The second text was Romans 1 where we saw the Gospel was definitive, powerful, had the righteousness of God, and inclusive of all who believe but exclusive of those who do not believe.

There are also two themes in the Gospel. One is the Gospel is the glorious message that God has, is and will deliver His people from their sins. The second theme is that the Gospel is the foundation, formation and the motivation of the Christian life. The Gospel is the foundation of every Christian and every church. The formation is like channel markers in a river that keeps

us where we need to be. The motivation is that God has loved us first in Jesus Christ, He bore our sins and saved us on the cross. We love Him because He first loved us and the love of Christ compels us. That's why we love to sing hymns like 'Tell Me the Old, Old Story' for I long to hear it.

Secondly, the Gospel is the glorious message that Christ has delivered me from the persuasion of sin and has called me to give me a new perspective. He has delivered me from the power of sin (regeneration) where I've been born again and have a new heart. He has delivered me from the penalty of sin (justification) and I have a new record. He has delivered me from the position of sin (adoption) where I'm in the family of God. He is delivering me from the practice of sin (sanctification) for I have a new life. He will deliver me from the presence of sin (glorification) where I have a new home. That is the glorious Gospel message that has been given to us.

That Gospel message leads us to the simple dynamic of being a Christ-centered church. Why would we say we are to be a Christ-centered church? Here is where I want to look at some key passages of Scripture. Let's first look at Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:19–22 says *[19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens (speaking to Gentiles), but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (the Word of God – the New and Old Testament), Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

In this passage I want you to see the Trinitarian nature of the church. The Father has saved you and has built you on the Word of God, Christ the Cornerstone. Now this New Covenant temple He indwells by His Spirit. We are the temple and the holy of holies where He indwells His gathered people.

Now I want to try and give you the picture of those who would have been living in the Middle East here. If you have been to the Middle East in general and the Mediterranean in particular there is one feature you will notice and that is rocks. They are everywhere. I remember getting this mailout from a group who was focused on the second coming of Christ and the mailout went something like this. I'm sure they were well meaning but it said 'You better get ready because Jesus is coming. If you don't believe it then let us tell you something not many people know and that is that the Jewish government has signed a contract with a stone quarry in Indiana in order to secure the stones to rebuild the temple on Temple Mount.' I have to confess but please don't consider me irreverent because this just made me laugh out loud.

Those people in those Jewish markets are business smart people. The last thing they would tell you they need is rocks from Indiana. They have all the rocks they need. That is the way they build, with rocks and stones. They have structures over there that are 2,000 to 4,000 years old because they are built with rocks and stones. In our country we think a house that has been standing for 150 years is old but in the Middle East they have materials with substance that lasts. Anybody there who had land could have a house because there would be rocks on that land. When they found a big rock that was embedded in the slope of their land they would get more big rocks to build their house as they used the embedded one as the foundation to build from. That embedded rock was known as the cornerstone of the house which all the other rocks leaned on to where if you moved any one of those rocks the house still would have stood but if you moved the cornerstone then the whole thing would collapse for everything rests on the cornerstone.

Here is the Word of God which is our foundation. All of it rests on Christ. It is a Word from Christ who is our Prophet, Priest and King. As our Priest, He brought a sacrifice once and for all for He was the once and for all Sacrifice. As our King, all authority has been given to Him and as our Prophet, He has spoken. We have His Word that is from Him and points to Him. I want to show you how He shows us that it points to Him. Let's look at Luke 24. This is the first day of the resurrection, the very first Lord's Day where Jesus has been appearing to a number of people. This is one of His appearances to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. When He meets them they are depressed.

Luke 24:13–21 says [13] *That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, [14] and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. [15] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. [16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. [17] And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. [18] Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" [19] And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet **mighty in deed and word** before God and all the people, [20] and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. [21] But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.*

Do you see what they are saying here? They thought He was the Prophet but because He was delivered up and put to death they figured He wasn't. The Bible told them this was going to happen. Jesus told them this was going to happen. That isn't an event that tells you He is not the Messiah for that is an event from the Word of God that tells you He is the Messiah. They had another view of who the Messiah was to be so they interpreted it as an event as though He must not be the Messiah. Let's look further at this text and see what Jesus does here.

Luke 24:22–27 says [22] *Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, [23] and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. [24] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." [25] And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the **prophets** have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" [27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

So what they said that caused them to question the Messiah was actually what the prophets said would be the mark of the Messiah from the Word of God. Would you not have loved to be a part of that small group when Jesus began to explain to them who He was from the Old Testament which they had? All the Scriptures point to Him, what He would do on the cross and how He would rise on the third day and not just a couple of prophetic statements. Let's look further at this passage.

Luke 24:28–35 says [28] *So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, [29] but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. [30] When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. [31] And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. (This could arguably be the first post Lord's Supper instituted as a means of grace to minister.)*

[32] They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" [33] And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, [34] saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" [35] Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. Then Jesus comes to meet with them in the Upper Room. Now let's look further down in Luke 24.

Luke 24:44–49 says [44] Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Here Jesus does with them what He did with the two on the road to Emmaus. Those who were slow of heart had a burning heart and when He explained to them from all the Scriptures who He was and what He was to do, now these gathered in the Upper Room here Him speak of Himself from the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Now the message is to be proclaimed to all the nations as declared in the Word of God.

So if we are to be faithful to God's Word with confessional integrity and Gospel driven, then to be faithful to God's Word we have to be Christ-centered for Christ was when He taught the Word of God. This is because the Word of God points to Christ. Let's now look at John 5.

John 5:30–47 says [30] "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. [31] If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. [32] There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. [33] You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. [35] He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. [36] But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. [37] And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, [38] and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. [39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. [41] I do not receive glory from people. [42] But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. [43] I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. [44] How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? [45] Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. [46] For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

So Jesus says 'you question whether I'm the Messiah but the Bible says that every truth is born by two or more witnesses' and He names them for us. Witness number one is the Holy Spirit and witness number two is John the Baptist who says 'He is the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.' Witness number three is the signs, wonders and miracles

of Christ that He has done. Witness number four is the Father and witness number five are the Scriptures. That's why He says to the Pharisees: *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.*

So if a church is faithful to the Word of God (the Gospel) and faithful to confess the Word of God then that means the Word of God which was given by Christ points to Christ and defines the Gospel for us as well as our mission, ministry and what God has called us to do. So here is this glorious Christ-centered truth. I want to give you two things about being a Christ-centered church.

First, Christ is the center, the sum, the substance and the circumference of a Gospel driven church. You can't be among our members, our ministries, our Sunday school classes, our pulpit ministry without seeing Christ as the center, the circumference, the substance and the sum of all that we say – *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain*, Philippians 1:21. If it is true of the individual Christian then it is true of the church for we are a Christ church, a Christian church. We were birthed by Christ, bought by Christ, brought by Christ and we are here to confess Christ. He is the center of everything we do and the center of every ministry we do so those who teach a congregational community, if Jesus is not in that lesson you are teaching then please fold the paper because that is what you are there for – not to invent Him but from His Word present Him.

I cannot preach a 'Christ-less' sermon. Why? It is because I preach the Word and the Word bears witness of Jesus. The only way I can preach a 'Christ-less' sermon is to ignore ultimately what the text is pointing to. If He is the circumference of what we do then we don't need to go beyond Him. The church does not exist to lift up any other banner but Jesus. Jesus is preeminent therefore Jesus is to be prominent and therefore Jesus is to be proclaimed. That means Jesus is preeminent which leads me to my second statement.

Secondly, the church declares the glory of the Triune God revealed in the preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. In other words, if Jesus is rightly preeminent you don't lose the Father in the Spirit for in the preeminence of Christ that is the way you find out who the Father is who sent Him and who the Spirit is who brought you to Him. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness of Christ therefore in the preeminence of Christ we have to do justice to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and we wouldn't have had Jesus without the Father sending the Son to redeem His people. Therefore the preeminence of Christ does not compete with the Trinity, it is the instrumentality whereby the doctrine of the Trinity is to be presented as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Our God has authored our Creation, the Son accomplished our Creation and the Holy Spirit ordered the Creation. God the Father authored our salvation. The Son accomplished our salvation and God the Spirit applies our salvation. God the Father has declared His providential blessings upon His people. God the Son is the Intercessor for the blessings of God upon His people and God the Holy Spirit is the One who is within us whereby we cry out 'Abba Father' in the Name of Jesus.

This is my warning. The preeminence of Christ doesn't make us a Jesus only church. The preeminence of Christ must be intentionally, conscientiously and clearly extolling for we have a Trinitarian God and Gospel. Jesus says in Matthew 28:19, [19] *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them **in the name** (singular) **of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*** There are many professing Christians who say to baptize in Jesus only and they even take baptism to do that. That is why this has to be done so carefully. We must declare

the preeminence of Christ but we can never do it in opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity but as an instrument to proclaim the glory of the doctrine of the Trinity.

We were saved by a Triune God, all three Persons of the Trinity and that is to be acknowledged. I want to show you how easy this is to be done. Notice that in Matthew 28:19 that when we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that name is singular. The first time this baptism was done it was in Acts 2. Let's look at that for a moment to see how they do Trinitarian baptism as we will see the preeminence of Christ in a right fashion but some actually pervert it from the text that affirms it.

Acts 2:37–38 says [37] *Now when they heard this (meaning Peter's sermon extolling Christ) they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38] And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Has Peter left what Jesus told him to do in Matthew 28, baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or has he now started a heresy of a Jesus name only baptism? No, the text isn't giving you the full details in all that happened in the baptism service. I have no doubt that Peter heard what Jesus said and when they baptized the 3,000 households they did it in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So what is it talking about in this Acts 2 passage? Name means authority and this baptism is taking place in the authority of the One who was sent by the Father to give us a redemptive work whereby you can be forgiven of your sins. You are forgiven under the authority of Christ. There is no other Name given among men whereby we must be saved. If you confess Jesus, who He is and what He did, then you will be saved. Therefore it is this Jesus who has authorized you to come to this New Covenant sign of baptism that He has authorized but the formula is in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The authority is the preeminent Christ that has authorized it, the One who had redeemed us. So here this stands for us this glorious Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer to point to the glory of the Triune God.

I'd like to look at one more text in this study from II Timothy 3. These are Paul's last words to the ministry to Timothy as Paul puts Timothy in his place to move forward in ministry. This is what he says to him. II Timothy 3:10–17 says [10] *You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [11] my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [12] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [13] while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

So this Word that we have is God-breathed, profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness and Timothy is to continue in it. In Timothy's life time the New Testament will take its place with the rest of the Scriptures but Paul tells him to continue to learn from the Scriptures he has already received. Through those Scriptures and those who taught Timothy, he was given the wisdom that leads to salvation in Jesus Christ. So Paul's last words

are pointing Timothy to the Word of God, to confess it, to preach it, to grow in it and by it and to be focused on Christ for this gives him the wisdom that leads to salvation in Christ Jesus.

So what Bible did Timothy get taught as a child? It was the Old Testament. The Old Testament doesn't have one message and the New Testament another. The Old Testament has the root message and the New Testament has the fruit of the message, but it is one message that stands through 40 plus authors over 1600 years and the unifying theme is the preeminence of Christ as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. As our Creator in Him all things were made, as our Redeemer we are redeemed through the blood and righteousness of Jesus and as our Sustainer He ever lives to intercede for us again and again.

My deep concern in this is that there is this discovery of what we call historical redemptive preaching – what we call in preachers, Biblical theology and what you call as Christ-centered ministry – and the concern is that it is presented not to the glory of the Triune God but to the detriment of the doctrine of the Trinity. That should never be with us. When someone comes here to worship they should never be able to leave here without seeing that we serve one God who dwells in three Persons. Jesus said the Father seeks true worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Our worship must be distinctly Trinitarian. We worship the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.

Our prayer life should be Trinitarian – our Father, in Jesus Name, praying in the Spirit. The sacraments are Trinitarian. Our hymns are magnificently Trinitarian for they not only declare the majesty of God with excellence but they can be sung by the congregation and not just some gifted singer. So we are Christ-centered, not to the detriment of the doctrine of the Trinity but to the glory of the Triune God in the preeminence of Christ through whom all things were made, by whom we are saved and in whom by His very presence we have our life. *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word as we continue to build these foundational statements about the church that Jesus has designed. God, thank You for these people that are committed to it, want to learn, to embrace it and live it. Father, I pray that You would guide us so that we would be faithful to Your Word and our confessions will be faithful to that Word with integrity and we will have integrity of our upholding of our confessions of faith that declare the things most surely believed. And that Word and the confessions will define our mission, message, ministry and methods. Then I pray that as we are faithful to Your Word in confessing that we will be Gospel empowered, Gospel driven and Christ exalting and that people might hear through our proclamation the prominence and preeminence of Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. When they see and hear Him, through Him they will see the majesty of our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – worthy are Thou, O God to receive glory, honor and praise. We praise the Father through the Son and in the Spirit for Jesus' sake I pray, Amen.

Power Point

GOSPEL-DRIVEN

TWO TEXTS / TWO THEMES

The Gospel is the foundation, the formation and the motivation of the Christian life.

The Gospel is the glorious message that Christ has, is and will save His people from their sins.

CHRIST-CENTERED

Christ is the center, sum, substance and circumference of a Gospel-Driven church.

The Glory of the Triune God revealed in the Preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.