

We Believe – Week #5

The Work of Christ: Colossians 1:15-23

INTRODUCTION:

“Our Statement thus far has affirmed truths about the human condition and truths about God that, when viewed together, present an obvious problem. On the one hand, we have declared that human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under his wrath (Article 3). We all stand in need of the restoration of our corrupt nature, reconciliation with our estranged Creator, and rescue from the condemnation which our rebellion against God’s rule richly deserves. Yet we have also declared the gracious purpose of God from eternity to redeem a people for himself, allowing them to share in his own triune love (Article 1). That purpose was first glimpsed in God’s pledge in the Garden of Eden that from the seed of Eve would come one who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15); it was revealed more clearly in God’s promise to bless Abraham, and through him to bring blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3). The Old Testament story of Israel left little ground for hope, however, for Israel herself had rebelled against God and was in need of a Savior. In the light of our sinful condition, how is this purpose to be accomplished? Many would simply echo the words of the German poet and skeptic Heinrich Heine, which he spoke as he lay on his deathbed: “God will forgive me. That’s his job.” Isn’t forgiveness God’s duty, his obligation? Can’t God simply forgive freely? But the Bible affirms that God is holy and just, which means that he cannot tolerate evil and must condemn all iniquity—“Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both” (Prov. 17:15). Because of his very nature, God’s role as Judge of all the earth demands the execution of justice. Evil must be seen to be evil, or cosmic justice will have no meaning; and without such a recognition even our human dignity as responsible moral agents will be undermined. Mere forgiveness of sinful human beings apart from the exercise of the judgment due their sin would be in contradiction to God’s character. The resolution of this theological dilemma, and the core of the gospel, is found in the work of Jesus Christ. Especially in the death of Christ on the cross, God’s righteousness is revealed—a righteous hatred of sin and a righteous commitment to his covenant promise to bring blessing to the world. There God’s wrath is poured out and his love is demonstrated, and he shows himself to be just even while justifying sinners (cf. Rom. 3:25-26).”¹

Last Sunday, pastor Taylor walked us through the “Christ Hymn” in Colossians to hear Paul’s words on the person and nature of Jesus. We’re back in this wonderfully deep and mysterious passage this week to look at Paul’s words on the work of Christ. We hear Paul reminding and clarifying for the Colossians that there is life-changing power in Christ Jesus. That he was firstborn from the dead, he has reconciled all things to himself, and he has made peace by his blood on the cross. Jesus can and has done all of this because of who he is (i.e., his person and nature). And since he has done them, we can have confidence in their effect on and in our lives. We are changed now and forever because of the work of Christ Jesus. And, as we’ve heard time and time before, **changed people live with changed purposes.**

Article #5 - “We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.”

a. ¹ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 140-141). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

GETTING STARTED – As you begin your group time, take time to answer this question together, what are the means of salvation you see people around you pursuing? Are they looking to themselves, others, or God? How do you see this specifically?

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. How would you answer the question, "What does Jesus offer?" And, what real and tangible implications does that offering have for you, me, and our neighbors?
2. What is core to this article of faith? That is, what is something that, if you took it away or changed it, it would significantly alter the article of faith about the work of Christ?
3. What is clarified for you in this article of faith about Jesus, both his humanity and divinity?
4. What is confusing for you in this article of faith? Take time as a group to chat through and offer perspectives on the things that are confusing. The beauty of a group is that often when we study together, we help sharpen and clarify what is confusing for one another.
5. How does this article on the work of Christ apply to my everyday life? That is, how does it change my outlook and approach to my Monday-Saturday life?