

THE CHRIST-CENTERED CHRIST

SCRIPTURE Matthew 10:34–39

SYNOPSIS After warning His Twelve about inevitable persecution, Jesus calls their hearts away from fearing men to fearing God. More than presenting a few cold reasons, He bids a radical reordering of their values. Now, in no small manner, He crowns His call for their hearts with the supremacy of Himself. Christ is above all. He is to be valued above all—even the most important, God-ordained relationships. All is to be done or lost for His sake. This is where He first bids any would-be follower to die (to self) and follow Him. His words cannot pass for good teaching if He is anything less than God. Such primacy is reserved for God alone. He is either a megalomaniac or Messiah. He is truly either deranged, deluded, or deity. Everything—even your own life—is to be centered on Him. This passage reminds us in Christ’s words that His coming was not man centered. He is the Christ-centered Christ and this is our greatest blessing.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. **THE WORLD** — Read Matthew 10:34. Jesus speaks in a Hebrew *mashal*—a paradoxical saying intended to challenge the hearer to seriously ponder what is said. His language is shocking. So when He says that He did not come to bring peace to the earth He is calling for deeper contemplation than what popular expectation affords. The Messiah was expected to bring *shalom* or peace (read Isaiah 9:6-7, Zechariah 9:10, and Psalm 72:7). Announcements of His birth affirm the same (Luke 1:79; 2:14). So how do these words make sense? Why would Christ say that He did not come to bring peace to the earth? How do Christ’s words affect you? What difference does this statement make in your life? How does this relate to Christ being Christ-centered?

2. **THE FAMILY** — God is the maker of the family. Read Matthew 10:35-36. Is this a call to neglect familial responsibility? Is this a command to destroy families? Now read Matthew 15:3-9 and 1 Timothy 5:8. Now read Matthew 10:37. The true test of a Christian is not what we have to offer, but what we love. Read and discuss the follower excerpt from Stephen Charnock:

“Is it your pleasure to think of him, to live to him? Are the remainders of unlikeness to him your grief, your yet imperfect image your delight, not because it is imperfect, but because it is his image? Every sigh, or a slight affection, is not a new creature. It is a deep engravement, a constant inclination, contrary to what it was before, as white to black. Do your affections correspond with the affections of God? Do you hate everything that he hates? Or is there any one lust thou wouldst caress and hide among the stuff? Such a frame is not the new-creature frame. God loves not one sin, neither must we, if we be like him. Is the love to God and Christ

DISCUSSION GUIDE

more settled than love to father or mother, which is an inbred affection, born with our natures? It must be so supreme. What desires have you to magnify his name? Do you love him so intensely, as to part with your lives to glorify and enjoy him? If you be new creatures, God and his glory will be dearer to you than friends, credit, life. He said not amiss, that no man is a true Christian who is not an habitual martyr; that is, that hath not a disposition to lay down his life for the honour of God."

3. **THE SELF** — Read Matthew 10:38. Jesus talks about their cross before His. He does not first talk about dying for them; He first talks about them dying for Him. Why? Now read Matthew 16:24 and Luke 9:23-24 and Mark 8:34-38. Jesus spoke these words before they understood that this will be precisely what Christ does for them. The meaning of this figure would not come in full force and weight until after Christ's own crucifixion. Once that came the depth and import of these words shine with greater light. Read and discuss John 13:15, Ephesians 4:32–5:2, Philippians 2:5-8, 1 Peter 2:21-24, and Hebrews 13:13. What does death to self look like? How does this point to Christ-centeredness? Read and discuss the following excerpt from John Flavel:

"If I open to Christ, this I shall gain, but that I must lose; I cannot separate Christ from sufferings, Christ will separate me from my sins; if I seek him, I must let them go; if I profess Christ, providence will one time or other bring me to this dilemma, either Christ or earthly comforts must go. It is necessary therefore that I now propound to myself what providence may, one time or other, propound to me; he hath set down his terms, Mat. 16:24. 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' This self-denial deserves serious consideration; for Christ extends it to natural self, righteous self, and civil self; and requires that I give up my life, my liberty, my estate, my relations, and my own righteousness, as hard to be parted with as any of the former. I must take up my cross, that is, the sufferings and troubles God shall appoint for me, and which I cannot avoid or escape without sin; and I must follow Christ, follow him whither soever he goes. I know not what religion may cost me before I die; all this it hath cost others; and there is no bringing down Christ's terms lower than he hath laid them."

4. **THE CHRIST-CENTERED CHRIST** — These words train us to see the purpose of His coming before the cross. The cross does not say all there is to say about Christ's coming. This passage is supremely important for a right understanding — not of the gospel — but of Christ Himself. Consider and discuss the following observations.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

- a. This passage reminds us, in Christ's own words, that His coming was not man centered. Jesus did not come to make much of us, He came to love us with Himself.
- b. Jesus' words cannot pass for good teaching if He is anything less than God. Such primacy is reserved for God alone. He is either deranged, deluded, or deity. Christ is God.
- c. By insisting that all be done for His sake and that He be loved preeminently, supremely, before and above all else, He is urging us to see His divine majesty and to center all on Him.
- d. The most Christ-centered person in the universe is Christ Himself. He must be. Otherwise, He would be an unrighteous idolater.
- e. Since His coming was, and His sending is, motivated by compassion and love (John 3:16; Matthew 9:36), we know that His insistence on His own supremacy is because He alone is our greatest good.
- f. We are created by God to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever — and we do not have to chose between the two.
- g. The foundation of the gospel is on Christ's worth, not my worth.
