



Introduction to the series: *"Towards a Christocentric Ecclesiology, or A Christ Centered Church"*

Introduction to: A Christocentric Ecclesiology Series

As we begin this series I believe it is important that we first explore and settle why such an emphasis is pertinent and necessary.

Why do we believe God is reforming His Church? Why does God believe it is important for His Church to be reformed? If we fail to establish this point well, at the outset, then all the rest we might say will falter on a frail foundation and lack sufficient justification for the repentance we are calling His Church and our own lives to worldwide.

When I listen to His voice within, each time I present the elements of reformation, I stop, ask the question once again - "Why is this reformation important...even essential?" For me the answer is always very simple, very direct, and very important...**BECAUSE OF JESUS!**

If the Church were my creation, my bride, my house, my family, and my people then I might form it any way I desire, and according to my own personal value system, but because it isn't mine...I didn't give my blood to create it...and I'm not its Lord, then it seems to me if we are to honor Him in our work with it we must form it and interact with it in a way that clearly reflects His ownership, His plan, and headship.

Listen, as Paul reminds us of the price that was paid to bring forth everything that was in the heart of Christ, including the Church:

*1 Corinthians 6:20 for you were bought **with a price**. So glorify God in your body.*

*Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near **by the blood of Christ**.*

*Colossians 3:17 And **whatever you do**, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

What was that price? Nothing less than the very life blood of Christ. This changes everything. From this point forward everything we do with our personal and corporate lives must clearly reflect the reality of these statements in the way we live.

To do with His Church what we desire for it, instead of a clear reflection of the price He paid to

possess it, is to dishonor the magnitude of the price He paid to create and own it. It is not “my church,” it is His. I didn’t give my blood for it. I didn’t pay that kind of price, and because of it whatever I do with it must clearly reflect the price He paid.

The writer of Hebrews tells us the Church is a “we thing,” not a “place thing,” and we are to reflect his ownership:

*Hebrews 3:5 Now Moses was faithful in all **God's house** as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And **we are his house** if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.*

Many, down throughout the centuries, have dealt with “His Church,” as if it were “Their Church,” but the writer of Hebrews is very clear about this matter...the Church is His. Those who lead it can not claim ownership of it. They must not lead as if it were “their” church. The manner in which they lead must clearly reflect the message of these verses. If not, then their leadership is null and void and must be discarded in favor of biblical leadership.

Many wonder what their purpose is in this world, and why God has left them here. If we define the answer to this apart from Paul’s definition in Ephesians we will miss our eternal destiny:

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

In these verses Paul tells us the grand eternal purpose of God is summed up, defined, and intimately connected with Christ and His Church. If we are to know who we are, where we are going, and what we are about, we must know and understand His eternal purpose for His Church. To fail in this is to do with His Church whatever we want because we fail to connect our actions with His eternal purposes. We enact our plan, our agenda, and our will for His Church, and thus create something far different than was originally in His heart for His Church. How could anything be more serious and more wrong?

As we live our lives, we desperately need to know the location of the Church and our lives interconnected with it. Once we see this clearly by the Spirit we will see everything else in perspective:

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Grander words cannot be found in all the literature of the world. They define us, fix us, and locate us. The way we handle His Church must reflect this heavenly image, this lofty connection, this eternal perspective.

The following verses couldn't be clearer as to who we are and where we reside. These are not just eschatological verses of future domain. These speak of our "now" :

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ...

Ephesians 1:20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ...

Ephesians 2:6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,...

Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,...

For Paul it is very clear what he is doing and where it is taking place. His entire ministry and interaction with Jesus' Church reflects his awareness of his heavenly connections. He does what he does from there. There all things are clear, as to their connectedness to Christ in Christ. To view and relate to His Church apart from this perspective will always lead men to do with His Church whatever they desire. This has been the case for too much of the last 1900 years and this is what needs reforming.

Paul tells us that the role of the Church is so serious that the very wisdom of God being communicated to the principalities and powers in heavenly places hangs on the Church's role in this process.

Listen to Paul describe just how important it is for the Church to be a Church after His heart:

1 Timothy 3:15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

The power of these words is practically staggering! When we consider that on earth the role of the Church is so important that its job is to maintain the truth that is in God in all categories. To tamper with the nature, the foundations, the traditions, and the ownership of Jesus' Church is to dishonor

the importance of the truth as it is in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21) and lead the whole earth into error.

Because most the errors of Church history can be connected with various powerful leaders we hear in Paul's following words the very reason why Church history is such a story of woe, division, heresy, abuse, and schism:

Ephesians 1:22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

However leaders lead His Church it must reflect, respect, and be in harmony with His headship. The story of the Church's history all too often testifies of another kind of leadership than this. What could be more serious?

In a nutshell, the reason we must contend for the Church to be reformed is because too great of a degree our involvement has failed the test of our personal ownership (we are owned by Christ and the way we do Church must reflect that ownership), has failed the test of Church ownership (It is Christ who owns the Church, not the people and not the leadership), has failed to reflect His eternal purposes for His Church (to reveal the wisdom of God in the earth and the heavenlies), has failed to understand the Church's location and nature (In the heavenlies as a heavenly entity), has failed to weigh the important place the Church occupies in heavenly places (the light and life of Christ revealed to principalities and powers), has failed to weigh the important place the Church occupies in this earth (the light and life of Christ to lost humanity), and fails to honor Jesus' headship in every aspect of Church doctrine and practice.

These verses tell us that however we understand and practice being the Church more is at stake than we almost dare to imagine.

When Jesus tells us in *Matthew 16:18* "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock (Jesus Himself) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." we are to hear a level of significance placed on the Church and its formation and practice that defies imagination.

Where is the Church built? Our answer and our praxis must be clear and clearly reflect the following:

Ephesians 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

1Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Peter 2:6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the

cornerstone,"

Therefore, we are not surprised to find that for the last 1900 years of Church history hell has been attempting to “prevail against it,” but throughout this time Jesus has had those who literally gave their lives to ensure that this verse is fulfilled in their lifetime, and in this, our day, He has those who are willing to stand up against the tide of human traditions that nullify the Word, doctrines of men that have led men off course, and doctrines of demons that have falsely defined the Church’s functions, roles, and nature.

As we embark on encouraging the Church back to a Christocentric Ecclesiology, we want to say that every one of these verses point the believer directly to Jesus Christ.

1. The Church has been bought by Jesus.
2. The Church is built and owned by Jesus.
3. The Church is the focal point of Jesus’ eternal purposes.
4. The Church resides in the heavenlies with and in Jesus.
5. The Church’s responsibility is to accurately portray the truth as it is in Jesus to every heavenly creature.
6. The Church’s head is Jesus Christ, not some earthly ecclesiological figure head.
7. The Church is built on Jesus Christ.

If everything we say and do with Jesus’ Church doesn’t clearly reveal, explore, honor, and submit to Jesus Christ, our focus is in the wrong place. If the Church belonged to man it would have had every right to go in any old direction, but because it belongs to Jesus, is all about Jesus, and is in fact “In Christ Jesus,” then every aspect of Jesus’ Church must reflect and center on Jesus.

No one describes the importance of re-alignment with these truths more than John the Revelator:

Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Revelation 21:9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Our engagement to the Lord Jesus as His bride and His Church is predicated on the basis of Him ultimately forming us into that which fulfills His purposes for our creation. For the Church to in anyway continue in its own independence from His eternal purposes is to forestall this great event, and to fail our ultimate calling and deny His ultimate passion. How much more important a reason do we need to let Him reform us into that which is after His heart and according to His design?

A Christocentric Ecclesiology is the only theology of the Church that matches its revelation in scripture. For the Church to be about anything else is to deny its biblical definition. It is towards this end we direct the Church and call her and her leaders to repent and return His Church back to Him who died and gave His life for it. We believe the Church, to one degree or another, has failed the test of these verses, and thus reflects things other than these in far too many cases. For this reason we call the Church, worldwide, and every believer and leader to take another look at the Church through Jesus' eyes.

With these eternal truths in mind we move towards redefining the nature and function of the Church. The following articles will work with the challenge of reforming through redefining the nature, purpose, and location of His Church. We invite you to join us in this grandest of all quests...