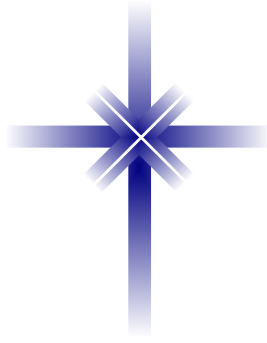


Carpinteria Valley Baptist Church



Centered in Christ

A Devotional Guide

It is our purpose as believers and followers of Christ to be so identified with Him that our life as a church and as individuals is *centered in Christ*. That is the essence of what being a Christian is.

The following verses and short commentary are given to be a devotional aid to enhance our focus and commitment so that the phrase “centered in Christ” will be more than a motto.

Stephen R. Button
Pastor

What does it mean to be *centered in Christ*? It is not just that we teach and preach about Jesus. It is not just that we are focused on His salvation. These are true, but scripture is full of references to being *in Christ*. It not only refers to our **placement** into the family of God, but to the **privileges** of belonging to God’s family, and **promise** of eternity in God’s presence.

Placement

Salvation is not free. It is very costly. But we have nothing of sufficient value to even come close to the cost of our salvation. Our salvation is paid for in full *in Christ*. Our redemption is found in the payment made by Christ Jesus.

Rom 3:24 *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

We are no longer dead in sin because we are dead to sin. God no longer sees a dead man because we are alive *in Christ*. Since this is what God sees, we too must reckon, or accept it, as true.

Rom 6:11 *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

It is said there are two things which are inevitable: death and taxes. However, God has provided a means to avoid death. The consequences of sin (death) is avoided when we accept God's gift of eternal life which is found only *in Christ*.

Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We are no longer condemned to live the life of sin because we now have the law of the Spirit which is *in Christ* to free us from sin's control of us. (Laws establish standards of behavior and consequences for failure to abide by them, i.e. death.)

Rom 8:1,2 *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, [who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

Our life *in Christ* is the antithesis of the death we experience *in Adam*. Just as Adam brought death to all those who are born from his seed, so Christ makes alive all those who are born of the Spirit.

1 Cor 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

Faith does not save. Many assume because they have faith they are spiritual, however, many simply have faith in faith. Self-confidence, self-assurance, self-effort cannot and does not justify a man. The value of faith is found not in itself, but in its object. So we understand that our justification is based on the work of Jesus Christ, in whom we place our faith.

Gal 2:16 *"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*

We are brought into God's family because of our faith *in Christ*. Faith is not our work, it is the recognition of Christ's work, and an acceptance of it on our behalf.

Gal 3:26 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Privileges

Our salvation is securely based on the love of God. Nothing can separate us from His love because we are *in Christ*. To suggest that something can overcome the love of God is to suggest that there is something, or someone, that is greater than God. Whether you search to the furthest reaches of space or to the most hidden depths of earth, nothing is greater than God, and therefore nothing that can sever us from God's love.

Rom 8:39 *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We should never need to “swear to tell the truth” since it should be characteristic of our faith *in Christ*. Our ability to speak truthfully with a clear conscience is only found in our relationship to Christ as evidenced by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 9:1 *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,*

Corporate unity cannot be mandated by government or manufactured by tolerance. Unity is the product of identity with Christ. We are literally (spiritually) placed *in Christ*, and while maintaining our individual identities, we become one *in Christ* and related to each other.

Rom 12:5 *so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

As we grow and learn about our parents, what they endured, accomplished, and sacrificed for our benefit, we take pride in knowing we are their children. Even more so, we take pride (*glory*) in what Jesus accomplished for us, and through us.

Rom 15:17 *Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.*

Common causes bring people together as well as great leaders. What greater cause or greater leader is there to bring us together in a common effort than Jesus?

Rom 16:3 *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,*

There are many in the Christian community with whom I would not otherwise associate, because of habits, ideas, or idiosyncrasies, if it were not for the fact they are “approved” by their faith and commitment to Christ. It is much more important that we be stamped “approved in Christ” than “approved AAA, government inspected.”

Rom 16:10 *Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.*

We are set apart *in Christ*. Sanctification, the process of becoming godly in attitude and habit, can only be accomplished *in Christ*. We are saints, “holy ones,” because of our relationship to Christ, not because of our accomplishments. We don’t have to die to become a saint, although our death to self (Gal 2:20) is an integral part of the process.

1 Cor 1:2 *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins. It steals from God what belongs to Him. It says I am self-reliant because I am self-sufficient. However, the fact that we are *in Christ* is “His doing” and not our own. There is at no time or for any reason that I can boast before God (v.29) that “I did it my way.” The wisdom to accept Christ, the righteousness to stand before God, the sanctification that sets us apart unto God, the redemption that frees us from the penalty of sin - all are His doing and can be found only *in Christ*.

1 Cor 1:30 *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, (NAS)*

There is a sorrowful position *in Christ*, and that is to demonstrate a lack of spiritual growth and an excess of secular influence. This is caused by an undo loyalty to human leadership and prejudice. Spiritual maturity cannot be obtained or maintained when our attention and affection is not *centered in Christ* but instead is “of Paul” or “of Apollos.” It is only on the foundation of Jesus Christ that our spiritual building can rise in the skyline of human existence.

1 Cor 3:1 *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*

The world views Christians as fools. We are spectacles of ridicule and rancor by those whose philosophy is worldly, sensual, and temporal. Yet *in Christ* we possess a wisdom that transcends the world’s horizon and empowers our apparent weakness. This wisdom enables us to deal with the trials, struggles, and horrors of an alien world.

1 Cor 4:10 *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!*

Those who have died have not ceased to exist. The euphuism for death, “fallen asleep”, is a reminder that death for the one *in Christ* is a temporary state. It is not the end of our existence. There is a life after death. If Christ did not rise from the dead (v.17) then those who have died “have perished” and face the same destiny as those who don’t believe. The hope of our resurrection is based on the reality of Christ’s resurrection.

1 Cor 15:18 *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*

Our hope *in Christ* extends beyond the grave because Jesus conquered death. Hope that does not extend into eternity is no hope at all, leaving those who trust in it most “pitiable.” Hope *in Christ* is hope in resurrection life.

1 Cor 15:19 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

This verse does not say that all people will be saved, but that all who are *in Christ* will be saved. As our connection to Adam brought us death, so our connection to Christ by faith will bring us life. Because we are born in the Adamic race we suffer the Adamic curse - death. By being born *in Christ* we have resurrection from the dead - we are “made alive.”

1 Cor 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

Our relationship to other believers is established because we are *in Christ*. A truly lasting and meaningful relationship is only possible if we are *in Christ*.

2 Cor 1:21 *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God,*

Everyone loves a winner. There is no greater winner than Christ. And His triumph is our triumph, not vicariously, but experientially. We may lose some battles, but we will win the war, because we are *in Christ*.

2 Cor 2:14 *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.*

There is no clearer expression of what happens to those who are *in Christ* than this. That which was once true of our nature and character is being replaced by an entirely new and improved nature and character. In a world that thinks new is better, it is amazing that people still reject the offer of Jesus to transform their life into a new creation.

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

Promises (Prospect)

Being *centered in Christ* means we are focused. The “simplicity that is in Christ” is singular and pure in nature. Before the temptation of Eve, she and Adam had one purpose - to honor and fellowship with God. With the deception of the serpent, Eve’s focus was drawn away from God’s will, and instead directed to her own pleasure. Our minds too “may be corrupted” from the “simplicity that is in Christ” by being deceived by our own pleasure-seeking. We would no longer then be *centered in Christ*, and we would be in danger of following “a different gospel.”

2 Cor 11:3 *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

The unsaved world does not understand the liberty we have *in Christ*. We are not in bondage to sin. There is no longer any necessity for us to sin because we no longer have the nature of sin. The world thinks liberty means the freedom to sin, while for Christians, liberty means having the freedom not to sin.

Gal 2:4 *And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),*

Racial, cultural, economic, and gender distinctions are lost *in Christ*. The world is striving to unite but will ultimately fail. Only Jesus can bond together such divergent groups so they are all one. We are one *in Christ*.

Gal 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Have you ever gone to a store and looked at the sale table, only to find the item you wanted on display was not included? Not so with God. We are blessed with “every spiritual blessing” that is possible. They come from God’s spiritual warehouse of blessing. These blessings are *centered in Christ*, and because we are *centered in Christ*, they are distributed to us.

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

We were dead in our sins, but have been made alive. Just as Jesus was resurrected, so also are we “raised...up together”. Just as Jesus ascended to heaven so also will we. And we will sit with Him “in heavenly places,” although the right hand of the Father is reserved for Jesus. We will have front row seats to eternity, no longer looking over the shoulder of time or space.

Eph 2:6 *and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

“Every good thing must come to an end” is an axiom which has no truth when it comes to God’s grace and kindness. We who are *in Christ* will draw upon the riches of His grace for all eternity.

Eph 2:7 *that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

We are God’s artwork, the result of a master craftsman. God hasn’t used a “still life” to model his creation, but the “resurrected life” of Jesus. We are created with a purpose, we are created with function in mind. God doesn’t intend that His preeminent artwork be set on a shelf simply to be admired, but that it accomplish “good works” which would add to the glory and honor of the Creator.

Eph 2:10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

We live in the “now” generation. That is, we want everything now. Yet when it comes to salvation many are willing to wait to see if they will be saved. If you were to ask them if they were going to heaven, they would say “I hope so” or “I think so.” Salvation is based on the past, fulfilled in the future, but possessed in the present. *In Christ* we are brought near to God “now”.

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

There are no cliques *in Christ*. All those who accept the work of Christ as revealed in the gospel receive the same inheritance as promised by God to Israel through the Messiah. That promise is shared with all through the gospel. Christianity is the only true classless society.

Eph 3:6 *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,*

Our behavior toward one another is to match the behavior God displayed toward us *in Christ*. God was kind, tenderhearted and forgiving to us, even though we deserved the opposite. When we forgive another, it is not based on their worthiness, but God’s.

Eph 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

The Christian life is not necessarily a life of ease and comfort. It is submissive service to Christ which may result in unpleasantness. Although imprisoned in a jail cell, Paul considered his chains to be attached to Christ, not to the jailer. His devotion to Christ was so evident that “the whole palace guard” recognized that his chains were *in Christ*. Do we consider our afflictions to be *in Christ*?

Phil 1:13 *so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;*

Our help is *in Christ*. The Greek word for “consolation” is “paraklesis” which is also used of the Holy Spirit who comes “along side” us. If we are going to receive help, comfort, fellowship, mercy, it is to be found only *in Christ*.

Phil 2:1 *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,*

What and how we think is important to our Christian walk. Arrogance and self-sufficiency are devastating to our relationship to Christ. Our mind, the way we think, should be *in Christ* because He provided the pattern to follow - humility, submission, even relinquishing what belonged to Him.

Phil 2:5 *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*

There is joy *in Christ*. This is no intoxicated exuberance, but the soulful awareness of His supremacy. In fact, the extent of our joy is in direct contrast to our confidence in the flesh. Having confidence in the flesh causes me to rejoice in who I am and what I can do, which is finitely limited. Knowing that I am totally dependent upon Christ focuses my praise and adoration *in Christ* who is infinitely limitless.

Phil 3:3 *For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,*

As good as we are, it is only because we have to be good. Were it not for the law, which governs our behavior, we would be lawless, without restraint, and there would be no good thing in us. Any goodness we have is the goodness of God, which is based not on our accomplishments or intentions, but is through faith *in Christ*.

Phil 3:9 *and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*

“Be the best you can be” was a great motto for the Army. It suggested that by joining the Army you could reach your full potential. For the Christian it is more than a motto. It is through our relationship with Christ that we achieve perfection. The word perfect means to be fully mature. The purpose of Bible preaching is to bring a man to conformity to Christ. You can “be the best you can be” only *in Christ*.

Col 1:28 *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

It is reassuring to hear that a distant friend is remaining faithful to God. Paul had a parental attitude toward those to whom he ministered. Even though he could not be with them, he was closely connected to them “in spirit.” His concern for them was rewarded with news of their continued faith. Will you cause rejoicing to a distant friend because of your steadfast faith *in Christ*?

Col 2:5 *For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.*

Jokingly some say those who are “dead in Christ” are Baptists. Actually this verse is intended to bring comfort to those whose believing loved ones have died. They will not miss out on the eagerly anticipated event of Christ’s return. In fact, they will be first in line when Jesus comes to establish His kingdom. Death is not the end. Those who have died *in Christ* are cutting to the front of the line.

1Thes 4:16 *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

The world tells us to have faith and show love. This sounds good, but the question is: in what should we place our faith and what or who should we love? Those who place their faith in the economy, politics, themselves, and assorted other things are routinely disappointed. The song of the 60’s which said “what the world needs now is love, sweet love...” ignored the love which is “exceedingly abundant.” While looking for “free love” they failed to see the love which was free (“the grace of our Lord”). Faith is worthless and love is empty if they are not *in Christ*.

1 Tim 1:14 *And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

Some couples purpose to set aside money for the eventuality of having children. They begin a college fund even before choosing a name. In today’s economy, this may be the only way to insure your child can afford going to college. This foresight and planning demonstrates a purposeful and selfless love. It is this kind of love that God displayed when, even before time began, let alone before we were born, God put in a trust fund grace that would be applied to us *in Christ* when we placed our trust in Him. That deposit was not based on anything we had done or even could do. He simply purposed to save and call us according to His purpose and grace.

2 Tim 1:9 *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,*

Grace speaks of sufficiency. It is a favor that is granted to one who does not deserve it, but which is nonetheless plentiful. You could not be strong in something that is inadequate or insufficient. When Paul says “be strong in the grace” he is declaring that the grace will strengthen you. But it is grace that is available only *in Christ*. Grace that stems from religious ritual or ordained ministers cannot make you strong. Grace strengthens because it is *in Christ*.

2 Tim 2:1 *You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

We think of witnessing as an activity in which we are in control: verses can be learned, arguments prepared, contacts made. Paul suggests here that it may also be simple endurance. We have to endure things simply because we have no control to alter circumstances. Paul is willing to endure what is necessary, to have no personal control, so that those whom God has chosen will gain the salvation which is *in Christ*. We can be a witness if we can do nothing but “endure all things.”

2 Tim 2:10 *Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*

Some have assumed that godly living brings prosperity. If we do what is right and honorable before God, all will go well, and we will be blessed. Yet, those who live godly *in Christ* will not always prosper, but instead suffer persecution. Knowing this, will you still “live godly?”

2 Tim 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

Wisdom is more than knowledge. Knowledge of Scripture by itself is not sufficient to make you wise. But coupled with faith *in Christ* the Scriptures brings wisdom which leads to salvation. Many scholars know Scripture, but have no faith, and therefore have not been saved. Wisdom is not present unless it brings you to “salvation through faith *in Christ Jesus*.”

2 Tim 3:15 *and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

What we do sometimes speaks louder than what we say. Showing our faith is as important, and sometimes more important, than sharing our faith. In fact, sharing our faith becomes more effective when we can back it up with “every good thing.” Of course, in ourselves there is no good thing. Our testimony is increased because people acknowledge that our goodness is only *in Christ*.

Phile 1:6 *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*

Being *in Christ* produces a boldness which would otherwise not be present. Because of our relationship with Christ we have greater insight into what is right and wrong. We could impatiently command others to behave according to our insight. It is better to demonstrate love through a gentle appeal (v.9). But it is reassuring that when boldness is needed, it will be available.

Phile 1:8 *Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting,*

Those who serve together *in Christ* share a perspective on the nature of their service. While we may not be literally prisoners as was Paul and Epaphras, we are under confinement of the world's restraints and constraints. Common suffering brings believers together *in Christ*.

Phile 1:23 *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,*

Stinging rebukes such as “goody two shoes” has kept many a child or teenager from doing what is right. Just what it means seems obscure, but the implication is clear. There are those, whose own behavior is evil, who desire to malign your good conduct by berating you. However, because our good conduct is *in Christ* we can have a clear conscience and know that God will deal with them in His way so they will eventually be ashamed of their actions.

1 Pet 3:16 *having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*

There can be no peace if we don't know Christ. Peace never occurs unless one of the opposing parties surrenders. Once we surrender to Christ we will have peace *in Christ*.

1 Pet 5:14 *Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.*