

Introduction

“Nothing but Christ! Nothing but Christ!” —George Whitefield¹

Nearly all the problems in the Christian Church today stem from a very simple problem—the failure to recognize that there is nothing but Christ. Many Christians bemoan the abdication of the Church that allows for society to dictate how she operates. Churches lustfully spend their time and money seeking to draw attention to the glamorized stage so that young men in thousand-dollar sneakers can more effectively plead for the approval of an adoring audience. Books are churned out and conferences packed, while pews are removed and auditoriums empty in order to solve the inevitable resulting problem—society is not impressed with the Church. And why should it be? Christianity is a faith system that encompasses one’s entire life with the love union between man and God. If this transcendental reality is packaged in the cheap veneer of ever-smiling speakers costumed with eerily relevant wardrobes, what is the culture to think about the contents? If Jesus walked the earth as a poor man with “no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him,” (Isa. 53:2, ESV) why do His followers need glitz, glam, and fog machines? If the Church were to remember her husband, she would begin to win others to Him. In the same way, if *we* would remember that there is nothing for us but Him, our lives would begin to resemble His—blessed in every way.

1. George Whitefield, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, ed. Lee Gatiss (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 1:275.

The core theme of this book—stated as succinctly as possible—is that there is nothing but Christ. But the fuller description of the theme is as follows. The point is not, of course, that Jesus is the only person in existence. Rather, this book is an attempt to show that nothing in the world *matters* without Christ, so much so that if it weren't for Him, it would be *as if* everything in the world never existed at all.

For example, why does that tree outside your window *matter*? Its ability to photosynthesize and create oxygen, which helps you live, doesn't really matter if your life doesn't matter. Saying, "this tree matters because it creates the oxygen that keeps us alive" is just kicking the can down the road—explaining one useless thing with another useless thing. If I ask what the point of a widget is and the response is to make a gadget work, the logical question is, "What is the point of the gadget?" What is *the point* of that tree? To help you live, to make your life better, to bring beauty into the world. But why? Why do you live? Why does your life need to be better? Why do we need beauty (and, what is beauty)? Without Christ, these answers aren't really answering the question. They're merely steps to an equation without a final answer. Without Christ, that tree *ultimately* has no more purpose than a unicorn. It is as if it doesn't exist at all.

I still remember the mental anguish of long division. My teachers didn't just want me to give the final answer, they wanted me to show my work. The longer the number to be divided into, the longer the work. Step after step had to be written under that division symbol of doom. My teachers weren't impressed if I scratched out a few lines without reaching the final answer. They never tired of telling me, "You haven't answered the problem!" In the same way, if we look at the things of the world and we say "This thing exists to make this other thing exist, or feel better, or whatever," we're merely scratching out the first line. We need to repeat the process with the next thing mentioned—"OK, why does *that* thing exist?" It's not until we get to the last line that the answer has been reached.

Most people never consider why they are alive. But, if you press them to answer, most will say something like, "I exist to make

a better life for my children” or, if they don’t have kids, “I exist to make the world a better place.” But that is no different than saying, “This human exists for the reason of making that human exist.” It’s like saying, “This widget exists to make that gadget exist.” OK, but what about *that* human, *that* gadget? Why do *they* exist? I hope to show that the answer to this question is nothing but Jesus Christ. The magisterial book of Romans says, “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Rom. 11:36a, LSB). All human beings and all things exist for His glory, to make Him known and to love Him. If that is true, then nothing in this world matters in itself, but Christ. Trees, planes, coffee, babies, nations, churches, and all the things in between do not matter if Christ is not in them. But (and oh!, what a “but” this is), if Christ *is* in those things, their importance is infinitely glorious. Though Christians answer the question of meaning by saying, “All these things exist for God’s glory,” few actually believe it. In math, you can get an ‘A’ without believing in what you write down. Not so in life. If you don’t *really believe* this, you don’t really know the answer.

By the phrase, “nothing but Christ” I do not mean to deny the truth of the Trinity. The Father and the Holy Spirit exist as distinct from the Son. I do not mean to say that nothing *exists* but Christ. Many things exist and will exist forever without Christ (like the devil). What I mean to say is that nothing *matters* without Christ. The Father and the Holy Spirit would mean nothing good to you without Jesus. Of course, without Jesus, the Father and the Spirit would mean you will endure just wrath for your sins. But, in that sense, the Father and the Spirit would mean *nothing to you*. So much so that, if asked, you would certainly say, “I wish they never existed at all.” Nothing—not even God—matters to you without Christ. I am not saying that the Father and Spirit would not be infinitely glorious without Christ. The Father and the Spirit are each fully God in and of themselves. They have the completeness of the divine nature. They are eternally blessed in infinite perfection. They matter more than anything even if Christ was never born. The point, then, is perspectival. From *our* perspective, nothing matters without Christ; after all, this book

is for humans, not God. Without Christ, the Father and the Spirit would be like a trillion dollars in a bank account you own but didn't know you have. The money doesn't matter to you if you don't know it's there. Without Christ, even God Himself cannot bless us once this life is past. If we understand this truth, we will begin to throw ourselves at Christ and give Him everything. He will lead us to *His* Father through *His* Spirit. Only when we live our lives believing that there is nothing but Christ, will we truly give Him our lives. Only when we truly give Him our lives will we truly live.

As a perfect Father, God loves His Son perfectly. All of the Father's loving affection is directed toward the Son. God the Father loves God the Son with all His heart. If *all* of His affection is upon the Son, the loss of anything but the Son will not overly concern Him. This is how God is able to allow such massive loss in the world. Hundreds of people have died since you started reading this book. Tornadoes have caused destruction; fires have consumed; wars have raged; things have been lost forever. How does this not cause God to fly into a fit of panic? We're talking about His *good* creation being destroyed, after all. Why does God not worry? Because all His affection is set upon the Son. This perfect love of the Father enables Him to perfectly see untold mountains of evil and still experience perfect peace. His Beloved Son is on the throne. Here is the beautiful thing: that *same* love is the inheritance of every Christian. Jesus says to the Father, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26, ESV). When the Church possesses *that* love for Christ—not the pink, cartoon-heart-shaped love in the vacuous breasts of so many people—then, and only then, will the Church prevail against the black hole of listless life with true life, and that abundantly.

The love that the Father has for Jesus can be in you. May it be so. May you come to understand that there is *Nothing But Christ*.

Does The Bible Teach That There is Nothing But Christ?

“Christ is all and in all.” (Col. 3:11)

After making the assertion of the introduction in the previous pages, this first chapter is an attempt to prove that the assertion is biblical. I am not seeking to develop the point of the book in this first chapter. I am only trying to prove that the point of the rest of this book is biblical rather than ideological. The central point of the book will wait until chapter 2. This chapter will present some, not all, of the key texts that prove the claim that there is nothing but Christ.

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are counted as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the coastlands like fine dust. Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before Him; They are counted by Him as non-existent and utterly formless. (Isa. 40:15–17)

This is a key text for the doctrine of nothing but Christ which Jonathan Edwards referred to frequently to bolster his theology of a great God. He says that the purpose of saying, “he lifts up the coastlands [or islands] like fine dust” is not to show what God can do. Rather,

... [H]is design was to show how insignificant, or rather what mere nothings they are, in his esteem, and before his majesty. The islands, says he, though so spacious as to afford room for

the erection of kingdoms, and the abode of nations, though so strong as to withstand for many thousands of years the raging and reiterated assaults of the whole watery world, are yet, before the adored Jehovah, small as the minutest grain, which the eye can scarce discern...¹

The point is that, for example, the vast and mighty coastland of California, which takes a full day to drive at high speeds, is like a grain of dust compared to God. Though the coast of California is vast and it generates the hopes and finances of millions, compared to God it is nothing.

But of course, it is not just the coastlands that are insignificant but all “the nations” which “are like a drop from a bucket” (v.15a). This analogy is not literal, obviously. A drop of water compared to a bucket of water is small indeed, but that is not an exact proportion. Hence, the next line says they are like “a speck of dust on the scales” (v.15b). Though a drop of water is small compared to a bucket of water, a speck of dust on a scale used to weigh something—especially an OT scale that is incapable of weighing minute objects—is *essentially nothing*. No one would claim the merchant cheated him out of the produce he deserves if a single speck of dust was added to the scale. In this sense, the “light dust” is, for all intents and purposes, nothing. The point, therefore, is not a literal description of God’s size because God is infinite and not bounded by space or time. Instead, this verse is indicating God’s *relative* size when compared to us, such that we become insignificant next to Him. Therefore, most importantly, verse 17 concludes, “...they are counted by Him as non-existent...” Take a second to meditate on the reality of that shocking biblical statement. God looks at the mighty nations with trillion dollar armies, or millennia old histories, or hemisphere-spanning borders, and, when compared to His own glory, considers them to be “*non-existent*.”

1. Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, ed. Harry S. Stout and Stephen J. Stein, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 26 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 15:582.

Does The Bible Teach That There is Nothing But Christ?

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
(Rom. 8:18, NIV)

The significance of this verse is not at all to be found in the denigration of our suffering. Paul, who wrote this, is not saying that our sufferings are insignificant. His point is precisely the opposite—our massive amounts of suffering are small *by comparison* when we place them next to God.

The “glory” referred to here is nothing other than Christ. Yes, we will receive rewards in heaven (1 Cor. 3:14). However, our reward is God and the amount we receive is more or less of God (Eph. 1:14). This is why the recipients of John’s Revelation are encouraged with “the morning star” (Rev. 2:28), which is a reference to Christ (Rev. 22:16). Or, they are told that God will write His name upon them (3:12; 14:1; cf. 2:17), which is a symbol for belonging to Christ and vice versa (cf. Song 2:16; 6:3; 7:10). Thomas Aquinas famously prayed that the only reward he wanted for his work was *non nisi te, Domine*—“nothing but You, Lord.”

Therefore, this verse means that our significant suffering will one day be obliterated by the *visio Dei*—the vision of God. Once we see Him, our sufferings will shrink like Mount Everest next to ten billion galaxies.

Kistemaker’s renowned commentary says Paul “is referring to ... Christ’s Return.” He beautifully summarizes this future reality this way,

Significant is also the fact that the apostle ... did not say ‘the glory that is to be revealed *to* us,’ but ‘the glory that is to be revealed *in* us.’ In other words, this glory [of Christ] will, as it were, come to us, enter us, and then, having filled us and enveloped us, will be revealed in us. We ourselves will be part of that glory: the redeemed will see it in each other. The angels will behold it in us, and will be filled with thanksgiving and praise to God.²

2. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, in *New Testament Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 12:265.