

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23  
KEEPING CONNECTED!

Jesus is the centre of everything! It is easy to say, but what does it mean? Jesus is the centre of church life – or should be; He is the centre of worship because worship is all about Him; the communion service is all about Jesus; He is the centre of this time we spend together on a Sunday morning. Colossians has already told us that Jesus is the centre of creation: the whole universe, the whole of time and eternity is centred on Him, was made by Him and for Him. The challenge for us is how to make life centre on Jesus when there are so many other things to interest us and concern us; how on earth can we say that Jesus is the centre of everything. This was the challenge that faced the Church in Colossae and is the challenge that faces us; as soon as Jesus is not the centre of the Church, we have lost our way!

It happens so easily; Jesus gets pushed aside. People come, 'puffed up' with their own ideas, full of their own experiences and their views of the world, full of wind; but people listen to them and the church loses sight of Jesus. We make up rules and regulations of Church life and some are quite detailed and then we bring a strong sense of self-discipline and feel that we must be making progress because of all these regulations, but this is an illusion because that is a dead-end street; we impose our view of the world and religion on others and Jesus gets pushed aside. Other things become more important than faith and faith gets neglected and after while we discover that we've lost sight of Jesus and something else is at the centre of life. The principles of the world around us are different: there is a demand for style, for the right image and style dominates over substance; in our world we live by the desire not to offend rather than acknowledge truth; 'me' is the centre of life; whenever these principles infect the church, we have begun to lose our way.

Paul draws two little pictures in Colossians 2 that help us: the shadow and the idea of being disconnected.

**1. The Shadow:** *"These are..." (Colossians 2:17)* We had fun one sunny day with our grandson teaching him about shadows. My hand was waving at him from the ground and he couldn't quite work this out to begin with. When he did, then he was making his shadow move on the ground as well. We know only too well that our shadow is not reality; my shadow is not me; indeed sometimes my shadow is a very different shape from the real me. The Shadow represents reality, but I am not my shadow; my shadow is not me. People had come to Colossae telling the Christians that it really mattered that they observed certain religious festivals in certain ways, and that if they didn't then they couldn't be Christians; they needed to keep these festivals, some of which were pagan, some were religious and if they kept these festivals, and the other rules and regulations, they would be saved. These things may appear to have value, but they won't make us holy people.

*"These are..." (2:17)* If we concentrate on these rules and regulations, we are in danger of losing sight of reality; what matters more is faith in Jesus. If we want to do business with God, we have to get beyond the shadow things, we have to go deeper, to faith in Jesus. Communion in the past was a way of keeping your name on the Church membership list; if you had come to communion 30 years ago, you would have had a card and your name was ticked off the list when you came through the door; every Church of Scotland congregation was the same. There is a danger of a focus on the shadow, i.e. names on a list, because we are in danger of neglecting reality – how strong is our Christian faith and how good are we at being disciples? There are big discussions about the style of Church and worship and some prefer this or that – the

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danger of that discussion is that focus is all on style and we neglect the reality i.e. that Jesus is Saviour and Lord and that we need to build up our faith. There is a difference between shadow and reality; we need to be wise enough to see the difference and then to focus on the reality and keep Jesus at the centre of life, faith and the church. The reality is that only Jesus can save; only Jesus can make us new people; only Jesus can change our lives and fill us with the blessing of God.

**2. Being (dis)connected** – there are all kinds of examples or illustrations that we could use: let me use the example of the phone – the old technology. The phone connects us with people; the phone connection makes that conversation happen and when it is broken we have a sense of anxiety because we are disconnected from the world and we see the need to get it fixed; so we call the phone company and they send a man round to reconnect the phone, to reconnect us with the world. There is a slightly bizarre picture that Paul draws for us; it is a picture based on the notion that Jesus is Head of the Church and that Church is His body. *“He has...” (Colossians 2:19)* The Christian life is life of faith in Jesus; as soon as we think that something else is more important than Jesus we begin to lose that connection with Him and before we begin to drift away and without realizing it eventually that connection has been lost completely. The connection is lost in whole lot of ways: it is lost by listening to some other views of the world and religion and listening to wrong people; it is lost by neglecting faith, allowing faith to be squeezed out by the pressure of other things and as faith gets neglected so our connection with Jesus gets lost.

Jesus is our life. The Head of the Church gives His people life, health and salvation. It is Jesus who stands at the centre of Christian faith. The One we confess to be the Son of God came into our world, lived amongst us, served the world, gave up His life to die on the cross, was raised on the third day – this Jesus is our life. He gives us the whole blessing of God on our lives: in Him there is forgiveness for our sins; in Him we have the hope of heaven; in Him we have peace; in Him we know the deep love that God has for us; we are a people loved and blessed; in Him our life is given shape and direction and we are called to be a people of faith, disciples learning to be more and more like Jesus. Jesus is the centre of all of that and we are connected to Him by faith and we must make sure that nothing gets in the way and that nothing interrupts or spoils that connection.

Communion is centred on Jesus. The bread and wine remind us of His death on the cross, the event at the heart of our faith and salvation; the bread and wine remind us of the love that God has for us, love enough to give us His Son; they remind us of Jesus' love enough to lay down His life; because Jesus died our sins are forgiven and we are free, new people. This communion service may be ordered in way that is different from the way you are used to celebrating it, the language may be different, the style may be different; you are going to discover that we're going to invite people to communion services in way that is different – all these are 'shadow issues'; all of these, if we get worked up about them, can drive a wedge between us and Jesus. The reality – Jesus is the crucified Saviour who loves us – is unchanged!

Communion is here to connect us with Jesus in a way that we can see and touch and taste. The most important thing of all about life and faith is that we are connected with Jesus; we do that by faith and we keep that connection by keeping faith. There are all sorts of things around in our world today that would challenge that connection or would loosen that connection, some of them in the church, some in the world. Our job as Christians is to keep that connection, is to keep faith with Jesus and live out that faith. God will grow His Church and this is His way of growing the Church – focus on the reality that is Jesus and not on the shadow things; find and keep the connection with Jesus; keep the faith!