

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Is Christ Enough?

In all things he might have the preeminence. ... Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 1:18; 3:11b)

There was a day many years ago when my soul went into a time of great anguish and my mind filled with many anxious thoughts. During this time, it seemed that everything came into question, including the ministry that I knew in my heart the Lord had placed me in by His sovereign grace. It was as if everything went into the ground to die (actually, it did!). I felt like the Psalmist who said:

If the LORD had not been my help, My soul would soon have dwelt in the abode of silence. If I should say, "My foot has slipped," Your lovingkindness, O LORD, will hold me up. When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul. (Psalm 94:17-19 NASB)

At its darkest moment my soul was in silence, I wondered if my foot had slipped, and my anxious thoughts began to multiply within me. But thank God, the spirit of the Lord began to speak to my heart with this particular Psalm. The Lord was my help. His lovingkindness held me up. His consolations gave delight to my soul.

It was during this time that a brother in the Lord who knew of my anguished soul asked me a question: ***Is Christ enough?*** (or: *Is Jesus Enough?*—makes the question more personal and relational.) Over the years, I have asked myself this question many times and believe it to be a profound one for all of us who belong to the Lord Jesus. It is especially pertinent for the works-driven or purpose-driven organized, institutionalized, ministry-centered church of our day where **Jesus is in the message to varying degrees but He isn't the message.** Just so you don't miss my point: Jesus is the good news, and our message to the world must shine light on Him alone. Unfortunately, the visible church of our day does miss the point as it is overly focused on so-called *ministry* that defines the works and the purpose. Jesus' name might be stamped on the ministry, but probably, more often than not, He is not the center of it. The test comes when the ministry begins to falter or even fails altogether.

You might think that such a question would be well-received by most Christians. After all, isn't our faith all about Jesus? Yes; but you might be surprised at how far askew the Lord's people can become. Many years after my experience, I had an encounter with a brother who regularly attended a coffee time several of us brothers had once a week. One day, this brother was all distraught over his ministry that seemed to be faltering. I thought I would encourage him with the same question, so I asked him: *If your ministry fails, is Christ enough for you?* With a perplexed look, he said to me: *You're crazy!* After that, every time I saw him in public, he said the same thing to me. He never understood the spiritual significance of the question. Although the answer was unexpected, in retrospect, it fits in well with ministries driven more by self-effort and a determination to make it work at all cost, than by the leading of the spirit—being ready at all times to lay it down if so directed by the Lord, who is after the heart more than the works. It was no wonder he thought like this, for the group (assembly) he was associated with was long on the emphases of many things, especially the supernatural and personal prophecies over lives, and short on Christ.

Here's the challenge: over a period of time of serving the Lord, our focus can subtly shift as we begin to see the work as the most important thing in our lives. What may have started as simply obeying the Lord and following Him now becomes like a job (or: obsession) that becomes the center of our life with the Lord no longer the center (if He ever was). Our service (i.e., ministry)—no matter how legitimate, or even successful—replaces the life of our Lord. If the Lord is not the center of our lives and all that we do, meaning what we do comes from His life, then where is He? He is outside knocking on the door of our heart, desiring to come in, and we answer: *Come back later; I am busy serving the Lord.*

"Is Jesus enough?" goes to the very heart of our Christian life and service because it touches upon our motives in serving. The world seeks after many things and receives its satisfaction from these things, even though they are very transient. For this reason, our hearts must be separated from the world. The things of the world will not bring satisfaction; the lust of the flesh will crave more and more and never be satisfied. As the Lord's people, what are we to seek after? What is to be our satisfaction? When we serve the Lord, what do we seek? Do we seek after praise or exaltation from brothers and sisters? Do we seek after fame, reputation, position, title, acceptance, a good name, prosperity, comfort, security, or many other things? Do we seek after some particular benefit or blessing?

It is true that God does bless, but what if there is no outward sign of blessing? What if all of a sudden nothing seems to go right anymore? It is easy to praise the Lord and be joyous when all is going well and when there is outward blessing and our service is understood and accepted. But what is our response when everything in our life seems to go into the ground and die, when nothing seems to go as it once did? You may feel unappreciated, all alone, isolated, even from brothers and sisters in Christ. You may be confused, even discouraged to the point of wanting to walk away from it all. You may come to a point of wondering: *What is Christianity all about?*

Dear brethren in Christ, if you have been truly seeking the Lord and desiring Him with a hunger and a thirst, this place of "nothingness" is a wonderful place to be. It is God's will for you. The apostle Paul, who went through great suffering and even rejection by some of the Lord's people, would tell us: *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

But why would God will for us to come to a place of nothingness? Because He wants to bring us to the place where all that remains in our life is His Son, where Jesus is all. Our motives are not always pure and the holy spirit must test our motives. Are we seeking only Jesus and His exaltation or are we after something else? Is it Christ plus some benefit to us? If all the benefits and blessings are removed, are we still satisfied with only the Lord Jesus? Will we be satisfied with no ministry, no name, no reputation? Will we be satisfied even if our brothers and sisters in Christ show no appreciation? Will we be satisfied if we are hidden from all the outward show of Christianity, if we are all alone with the Lord? Will we be content with Him alone and nothing else? Can we just sit at His feet, gazing upon Him, being satisfied? Or must we have something more than Jesus? It is as if He is not quite enough for us, so we must add all sorts of things such as movements, teachings, activities, programs, causes, or anything else that attracts us. There is a great danger when these added things become more important than the Lord Himself because they may replace the Lord entirely.

Christ is to be central and supreme in all things in the lives of His people that He might have the preeminence in all things. This is God's heart and it is our calling. God the Father will not be satisfied until His beloved Son is all and in all. He is God's goal and God's end. This is what it means to be preeminent. He is all! There is nothing beyond our Lord. Let us live in this all. Let Jesus be enough. He is our life.