

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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Jesus—Christ and King!

It is not unusual to read commentary or books about our Lord in which the word *Christ* is used almost to the exclusion of our Lord's personal name *Jesus*, standing alone. If *Jesus* is referred to, it is almost always joined with the word *Christ* as in *Jesus Christ* or *Christ Jesus*. I have done this as well. It seems that references to *King Jesus* in lieu of *Christ Jesus*, or *Jesus the King* in lieu of *Jesus Christ* are not very popular. Scripture does not give us much help in this regard either. In spite of this, I want to make the case for injecting more references to King Jesus in my writings in lieu of Christ Jesus (or, its reverse counterpart).

To be clear, the word *Christ* or its combination with the name *Jesus* is very, if not extremely, scriptural, especially in Paul's epistles. Further, the word *Christ* by itself has no counterpart in our modern world, making it a rather unique word that only Christians own. But what does it mean? As I am writing this, a new thought has come to me. Perhaps the best way to view Christ is that it signifies the summing up of the fulfillment of the law, the prophets, and the psalms (Luke 24:44), which speaks to all that Israel was looking for and, specially, to the coming of the kingdom of the heavens and its king. Jesus was the fulfillment of all of this and more in His first arrival. So, perhaps, the term *Christ* points to all of this.

This raises a question: Does the term *Christ* lead one to a more personal relationship with our beloved, or does it make one look upon Him in sort of a static, religious, even institutional way? The answer for me is "no" to the first part, and "yes" to the second part. My heart continually strives for it to be the reverse and desires this to be projected in my writings as well. In other words, I desire an approach that leads to a greater relationship with our beloved and away from a static, religious, institutional mindset. If my writings produce something other than this, then I miss the mark of writing. Above all else, I desire that people come to know the person of Jesus as their very own life, the one I often say is ***the lover of our life*** (from Jesus' perspective), as well as the one who must be ***the love of our life*** (from our perspective).

So, let's look at *Christ*. Depending on the translation, *Christ* appears 500-plus times, either by itself or joined with the name *Jesus*, ordered two ways (*Jesus Christ* or *Christ Jesus*). A few translations have opted to use the words *Messiah* or *anointed*, and, in a rare but refreshing case, *King*.

Here is the challenge: without explanation, the word *Christ* is simply a word to most (and abused by many), which can lead to misunderstandings. Case in point: I met a person once that thought Christ, as in *Jesus Christ*, was Jesus' surname—without doubt, there are others out there with the same confusion. When it appears in reverse, *Christ Jesus*, well, that creates a whole other level of bewilderment. We trust that these are exceptions, but I wonder. I know this is a personal issue, but after a while the word *Christ* takes on a heavy, religious tone—a word theologians and preachers use. So, what does *Christ* mean?

Strong's *Concordance* tells us, in Hebrew, the word *mashiyach* means *anointed*; usually a *consecrated* person (as a king, priest, prophet, or saint); specifically, the *Messiah*: - anointed, Messiah. Again, Strong says that, in Greek, the word *christos* means *anointed*, that is, the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus—Christ. An *epithet* is a "descriptive name or title applied to a person." Thus, the word *Christ* is a title with a specific meaning attached to it—in this case, the meaning refers to "being anointed", which, in turn, means

consecrated or "set apart as holy, for a specific purpose." Given these definitions, some translations use *Messiah* entirely in the place of *Christ*; others use *Anointed*; yet others mix it up a bit, using both.

All of this makes perfect sense when speaking or writing of our Lord Jesus. He is the Messiah, specifically the Messiah of Israel, the one the ancient prophets announced would come to deliver or rescue Israel. And, by the way, He did so in His first or inaugural manifestation to humanity. Israel is now called the *new creation* (Galatians 6:15-16), which is the called-out body of Jesus made up of descendants of Abraham and non-descendants from among the nations. But even the word *Messiah* requires some explanation for the novice, especially one with no Hebrew background. After all, how would a so-called *gentile* (non-Jew) know anything about a messiah, let alone expect one to arrive on the stage of world history? (I prefer the word *nations* over *gentiles*; but I use it here because it has a general understanding to people, especially for those with a Judeo-Christian worldview.)

The same challenge applies to "anointing"; this also requires some level of explanation to the novice, especially the gentile. At best, it means that Jesus is someone special who is set apart from others for a very specific purpose—in this case, God's purpose. Of course, there is some abuse of this word in certain quarters of Christian teaching where the "anointed ones" are those who hold down a pulpit week after week. "Touch not the anointed" is the warning. I know this one from personal experience.

Now, using the word *messiah* or *anointed* with the name *Jesus*, or simply presenting these as standalones, helps to clear up some confusion or, at least, to direct the emphasis to an epithet and not a surname. However, there is one title that I believe rises above these epithets. It is *king*. Calling our Lord *King Jesus* provides a clarity that the word *Christ* does not. When one hears the word *king*, it should immediately form an image that the one holding the title has a level of authority and power that most do not have. In this regard, I find N.T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament—A Contemporary Translation* very refreshing because he mixes up the word *Christ* quite a bit by incorporating *Messiah* or *King* in its place. In fact, he generously refers to Jesus as king or *King Jesus*.

I prefer to mix it up a bit as well, and I have begun to do this in my writings, especially in referring to our Lord as king instead of Christ. I see this as acceptable given that the anointed of Hebrew scripture included kings, priests, and prophets. Of course, Jesus is all of these. Further, when appropriate, I will bypass all the titles and simply refer to our Lord in the personal as *Jesus*. I won't belabor the point; I trust most understand what I am saying. Keep in mind that the question at hand is only in regard to the word *Christ* and replacements for it. There are many other epithets that are available to describe our Lord Jesus, such as Son of God, Son of man, the last Adam, the second man, the Savior, the Lamb, the Lambkin, etc. Depending on the subject, I try to incorporate these and more into what I write as well.

Bottom-line: I don't know about you, but the name *Jesus* speaks to my heart relationally. Of course, let us not forget that tracing the word *Jesus* or *Yeshua* back to its Hebrew root words signifies savior, deliverer, rescuer, preserver, victor. Jesus is all of these, and more, to each and every one of us in a very personal way. We might not understand all His epithets, but adding the title *king* to Jesus' name should bring great comfort to our hearts, knowing such a one rules over all creation and is the ruler of the kings of the earth—today, not way off in the future; especially as we see all that is going on in the world. Even greater than this, at the standalone name of *Jesus*, our hearts should leap with joy, for He has loved us by laying down His life for us, and this love has never diminished, nor will it ever! *God is love*, and we know God's love in and through the one called *Jesus*, the Son of God's love! He is King Jesus, and we have been called into His kingdom of love and glory. This is good news!